

*Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God*

Chapter 4

By Francis Chan

*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, hallow-hearted prosperity.<sup>5</sup>*

There is an incalculable, faultless, eternal God who loves the frail beings He made with a crazy kind of love. Even though we could die at any moment and generally think our puny lives are pretty sweet compared to loving Him, He persists in loving us with unending, outrageous love.

The only way I know to respond is like the man in one of Christ's parables:

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

In this account, the man joyfully sold all that he had so that he could obtain the only thing that mattered. He knew that what he had stumbled upon—the kingdom of heaven—was more valuable than anything he had, so he went for it with everything in him.

This kind of enthusiastic response to God's love is entirely appropriate. Yet what a contrast to our typical response at discovering the same treasure!

In the United States, numbers impress us. We gauge the success of an event by how many people attend or come forward. We measure churches by how many members they boast. We are vowed by big crowds.

Jesus questioned the authenticity of this kind of recordkeeping. According to the account in Luke chapter 8, when a crowd started following Him, Jesus began speaking in parables—so that those who weren't genuinely listening wouldn't get it.

When crowds gather today, speakers are extra conscious of communicating in a way that is accessible to everyone. Speakers don't use Jesus's tactic to eliminate people who are not sincere seekers.

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

In the parable of the sower, Jesus explained that the seed is the truth (the Word of God). When the seed is flung onto the path, it is heard but quickly stolen away. When the seed is tossed onto the rocks, no roots take hold; there is an appearance of depth and growth because of the good soil, but it is only surface level. When the seed is spread among the thorns, it is received but soon suffocated by life's worries, riches, and pleasures. But when the seed is sown in good soil, it grows, takes root, and produces fruit.

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.

Most of us have too much in our lives. As David Goetz writes, "Too much of the good life ends up being toxic, deforming us spiritually."<sup>6</sup> A lot of things are good by themselves, but all of it together keeps us from living healthy, fruitful lives for God.

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

Has your relationship with God changed the way you live? Do you see evidence of God's kingdom in your life? Or are you choking it out slowly by spending too much time, energy, money, and thought on the things of this world?

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 that you "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*, so I could have an appealing, popular Jesus who didn't suffer. 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 deeply. I was told I was good enough, "godly enough."

But this went against everything I was reading in the Bible, so I eventually rejected what the majority said and began to compare all aspects of my life to Scripture. I quickly found that the American church is a difficult place to fit in if you want to live out New Testament Christianity. 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 why 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?

The Bible says to test ourselves, so in the next few pages, I am going to offer you a description of what halfhearted, distracted, partially committed, lukewarm people can look like. As you read these examples, I encourage you to take a searching, honest look at your life. Not who you want to be one of these days, but who you are now and how you are living today.

LUKEWARM PEOPLE attend church fairly regularly. It is what is expected of them, what they believe "good Christians" do, so they go.

"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. Their 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 ... if it doesn't impinge on their standard of living. If they have a little extra and it is easy and safe to give, they do so. After all, God loves a cheerful giver, right?

"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 both at church and outside of church; they care more about what people think

of their actions (like church attendance and giving) 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).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE don’t really want to be saved from their sin; they want only to be saved from the penalty of their sin. They don’t genuinely hate sin and aren’t truly sorry for it; they’re merely sorry because God is going to punish them. 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).

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Rom. 6:1-2).

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 yourselves. 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).

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted? ‘The first,’ they answered” (Matt. 21:28-31).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE rarely share their faith with their neighbors, coworkers, or friends. 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).

LUKEWARM 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, their money, and their 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 they do not love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength. They would be quick to assure you that they try to love God that much, but that sort of total devotion isn't possible for the average person; it's only for pastors and missionaries and 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 others but do not seek to love others as much as they love themselves. Their love of others is typically focused on those who love them in return, like family, friends, and other people they know and connect with. There is little love left over for those who cannot love them back, much less for those who intentionally slight them, whose kids are better athletes than theirs, or with whom conversations are awkward or uncomfortable. Their 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 come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked 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. Daily life is mostly focused on today’s to-do list, this week’s schedule, and next months’ vacation. Rarely, if ever, do they intently consider the life to come. Regarding this, 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 tear, many live 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. And 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. They are quick to point out, "Jesus never said money is the root of all evil, only that the *love* of money is." Untold numbers in lukewarm people feel "called" to minister 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 loose 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 want to 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 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!”

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand” (1 Chron. 29:14).

“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 focus on safe living 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 God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in 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 at age twelve, were baptized, come from a Christian family, vote Republican, or live in America. Just as the prophets in the Old Testament warned Israel that they were not safe just because they lived in the land of Israel, so we are not safe just because we wear the label *Christian* or because some people persist in calling us a *Christian nation*.

“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 need God to help them—they have their retirement plan in place. They don’t genuinely seek out what life God would have them live—they have life figured and mapped out. They don’t depend on God on a daily basis—their refrigerators are full and, for the most part, they are in good health. 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 aren't very different from your 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. Blind Pharisee! 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 is not an all-inclusive definition of what it means to be a Christian, nor is it intended to be used as ammunition to judge your fellow believers' salvation. Instead, as 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, it is a call to "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in faith; test yourselves."

We are *all* messed-up human beings, and 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 sorts of mentalities and habits and a life that is in the process of being radically transformed. We'll get to the transformation later, but now is the time to take a serious self-inventory.

When I was in high school, I seriously considered joining the Marines; this was when they first came out with commercials for "the few, the proud, the Marines." What turned me off was that in those advertisements, everyone was always running. Always. And I *hate* running.

But you know what? I didn't bother to ask if they would modify the rules for me so I could run less, and maybe also do fewer pushups. That would've been

pointless and stupid, and I knew it. 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? Is it 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, that it sickens our souls. He is saying that this kind 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"?

When salt is salty, it helps manure become good fertilizer ... but lukewarm and uncommitted faith is completely useless. It can't even benefit manure.

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