

One-on-One With Francis Chan: Writing, The Church, Acts and a Change in Calling

It's been years since former megachurch pastor Francis Chan addressed the body of Christ through a mass-produced book. Yet as the state of the church changed, people drifted in and out and to and from congregations, and Chan felt the Holy Spirit prompting him to pick up his pen once more.

In *Letters to the Church*, which released just a few days ago, Chan challenges his contemporaries to embrace the hard, authentic journey of committing to Christ. He spoke with Charisma News earlier this year about his new book and more. Below is Part 1 of the interview.

Why write this book now?

I was hesitant for a few years to share too much of what I was doing because I felt like people just cared too much about what [I was saying and doing].

As a lot of people know, I don't do a lot of interviews, I try to stay out of the public eye, and some of that was I just felt like we were at a time when people are talking too much about writers and speakers, "What's this guy doing?" "What's this woman doing?" And not enough focus on just them being alone with God and seeking Him. And there's the other side of I tried different things, [and] I don't want to say, "Oh you gotta do this, you have to do that."

I wanted to live something out for a while rather than talking about it.

So I did wait, and I wanted to see if something was sustainable with the church. I wanted to see, is it even

possible to love people that deeply, and we live in a country where everyone is about themselves.

It's built around independence and could we really be a church that's interdependent like this and care for each other like this? And I guess so some of it, I found so much joy in the church lately that I wanted everyone to experience it, and like I say in the book, that's not what I'm hearing from people.

Everyone's bitter about the church, and if they are excited about the church, it seems like for the wrong reasons. So, you know, ultimately you get to that point in life where—at least I do—there's certain times when I feel like God wants me to do something, like I don't really enjoy writing. I hope never have to write another book again, I really do.

But if the Lord calls me to or I really feel like He wants me to, of course I'd do it, and I'll find joy in it, but I feel like everyone and their mother's writing a book right now. So in some ways, it's the last thing I wanted to do. But also, when you hear a lot of people misunderstand you, you want to sit down and just really write out, "Well, here's what I really mean and you're taking one short answer that I gave in some interview and assuming a lot of things about what I believe." And so in my quest to be more silent, other people speak for you, and it's usually not very accurate. That's part of what led to the writing, as well.

Is it possible to recreate the Acts church? What did you find?

That it's very, very difficult, and that it's a lot of work, but it is so worth it. It's like so many of the commands that are, that grate against your flesh and wouldn't be your natural course of action, but then once you force yourself to submit to God's Word, you end up being blessed in ways you didn't expect. And so I think that's what I found, was one, yes, it's a lot harder than I thought, but two, it's the

blessing in it, and the peace in it, is so much greater than what I was anticipating.

What is the most difficult thing to surrender to the Holy Spirit in this process?

I think it's loving those who are so different from you and loving them deeply.

It's very easy to [tell yourself] "I'll preach to anyone because I don't have to deal with them. I'll preach to a million people, and they could be the most angry whatever, but when we're talking about becoming family and becoming body, like you are a part of my body and loving you to that extent, that's difficult."

And as people get to know me and get closer to me, they see the faults, and there's a lot of forgiveness and bearing with one another in this commitment to each other. It's difficult, and it's also difficult getting more and more difficult to have any sort of authority in the church, whereas, you know as Christians, we're supposed to be so different from the world, where we love having a King. It's weird, but we love His commands. And we're supposed to be people who love and respect the leaders in the church because God placed them there.

But we live in a time when no one speaks well of authority. In fact, you'll get chastised if you speak well of the police or the president or of any authority figure. It's just so popular to bash and so then to try to lead a church and to believe God's called you to be an elder in the church where there's a climate of just rebellion, it's difficult, and I think a lot of people and they go oh cool yeah I want to do a smaller church, sometimes that's in response to, it's an act of rebellion because they don't like the way the leaders are doing it somewhere else.

Or they're against leadership. I'm just going to gather some friends together and we're going to call it a church. That's

not really biblical. There's more to it, and there are shepherds who are supposed to see, there are elders that offer this pastoral care, and so that's something that I found is really difficult nowadays.

How has your calling shifted since you first planted your megachurch in 1994?

It's changed a lot.

I mean now it's really a shared leadership, and that's not just a verbal thing. I mean, what I've learned to do is use my gift but not overuse it to where people depend on me, and they don't. It's just like being a parent. You want to help your kids out, but you don't want to overdo it, because it weakens them. And you now want them to take responsibility because there's going to be a day where they are away from you, and they need to be on their own, so to be a good dad, I need to train them in such a way that I don't do everything for them.

And so realizing that to be a good shepherd, I can't just expect these guys to listen to me all the time and for the rest of their lives, but like I train them to make disciples and teach others, and part of that is by not doing everything for them. I really do feel more a part of a team, and it's giving other people responsibility [that] I think has been the key. I felt like by having a bunch of pastors and having them truly shepherd their people, I let them know, "Look, I'm not going to counsel the people in your church. You are. It's your responsibility."

This is part 1 in a multi-part series.