

Summary of:

Letters to the Church

Francis Chan

This book is a series of letters that confront and challenge churches in America today. Each letter addresses an issue that your church may be facing.

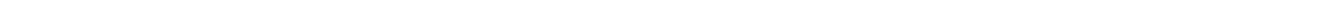
Francis cautions us that many people want to change the Church based on personal preference rather than biblical conviction. God clearly wants us to do things His way [[Amos 5:21-24](#), [Isa 58:1-5](#), [Mal 1:6-14](#), [1Cor 11:17-30](#), [Rev 2:5](#), [Rev 3:15-16](#)].

Francis does **not** claim that this book offers a prescription we can all follow to have a church that pleases Christ. His hope for each of us is that we care enough about Christ's Church to fast and pray as we seek wisdom and direction from God.

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The Departure

Initial Goals

When Francis began Cornerstone Church, he had three goals.

1. That all members would sing directly to God with reverence as if He was listening to each person.
2. That the church would dig deeply into Scripture and take it seriously.
3. That members would live holy lives and challenge one another to action.

Questioning

Cornerstone was meeting their initial goals but leaders began to wonder if their definition of church matched God's definition of church. Francis and other key leaders were concerned that the church was too dependent on one person. They wanted people to experience almighty God and the moving of the Holy Spirit, not to hear Francis Chan.

Time to Move

Francis and his wife got a clear prompting from the Holy Spirit to make a move. They sold their house and moved their family to India, Thailand, China, then back to the States. When they returned, they began taking a different approach to church planting.

Just Open the Door

God designed the Church to be more than what most of us experience in America today [[Rev 3:19-21](#)].

Let our obsession be to seek His approval.

Sacred

We don't understand what it means for something to be sacred. We live in a human-centered world among people who see themselves as the highest authority. We fail to give sufficient thought to the rights God deserves as God.

Rushing into the Sacred

While others rush into prayer with opinions and demands, God expects us to approach Him with reverence and caution [[Mat 6:9](#), [Luke 11:2](#), [Ecc 5:1-3](#)].

Sacred Mystery

Meditate on the miracle that you are a human being who is currently joined to a God who dwells in unapproachable light [[Eph 5:29-32](#), [1Tim 6:16](#)]. To rejoice with joy that is inexpressible, we must meditate on His mysteries [[1Pet 1:8](#)].

A Small Piece of the Temple

As Christ-followers, we form one house for God. Each of us is a block of a temple that transcends time and space [[1Cor 3:16-17](#), [Eph 2:19-22](#), [1Pet 2:5](#)].

Marvel at God's Wisdom

Heavenly beings are shocked by God's Church while many on earth yawn. The early church didn't need energetic music, videos, attractive leaders, or elaborate lighting to be excited about being a part of God's body. The pure gospel was enough to put them in a place of awe [[Eph 3:8-10](#)].

Let His Word fill us with awe without adding human embellishment.

The Order

Commands vs. Expectations

Through His Word, God has placed an order for how He wants us to build His Church. We think about what we and others want in a church (good service, well-communicated sermon, age-specific ministries, preferred type of music, coffee, childcare, clean building, convenient parking). In the spirit of Cain, we bring an offering we think He should accept rather than what He has ordered.

Some commands God gave the Church include:

- ▶ Love one another as I have loved you ([John 15:12](#)).
- ▶ Visit orphans and widows in their affliction ([Jas 1:27](#)).
- ▶ Make disciples of all nations ([Mat 28:19](#)).
- ▶ Bear one another's burdens ([Gal 6:2](#)).

The Corinthians wanted Paul to preach with eloquence, but he refused ([1Cor 1:17](#)). He wanted their faith to rest on the Spirit's power, not on him ([1Cor 2:1-5](#)).

We aren't doing people any favors by pretending they are the center of the universe. Our focus should be on what would please God most.

Devoted to His Orders

The early church was devoted to what would please God most ([Acts 2:42](#)).

- ▶ Apostles' Teaching ([John 6:63](#), [Eph 2:20](#), [1Tim 4:13](#), [2Tim 3:16-17](#), [Heb 4:12](#), [Rev 1:3](#))
- ▶ Breaking of Bread: God designed Communion to be an intimate act of remembering His flesh and blood.
- ▶ Prayers ([Acts 4:31](#)): If prayer isn't vital for your church, then your church isn't vital.

God wants to be the reason we are assembling as a church.

The Gang

It is staggering to realize that we have reduced the sacred mystery of Church to a one-hour service. Gangs have more devoted members than many churches.

Jesus says our love for one another is the thing that will attract the world ([John 13:34-35](#),

[Rom 12:9-10](#), [1Cor 13](#), [1Pet 4:8](#), [1John 4:7-12](#)).

Supernatural Unity

Jesus prayed that the unity of His followers would be equal to the oneness of the Father and Son. The purpose of our unity is so that the world may know that God sent Christ and loves us ([John 17:20-23](#)).

Our fearless unity is a clear sign to our enemies of their own destruction ([Php 1:27-28](#)).

Jesus told people to count the cost of being members of His Church ([Luke 14:25-35](#)). He didn't expect us to be flawless, but did demand commitment ([Luke 9:57-62](#)).

Servants

- ▶ At the root of our calling is a command to imitate Him by serving one another ([John 13:14](#), [Mat 20:28](#)).
- ▶ If you think that sitting back and letting the church staff feed you will bring you fulfillment, you are wrong ([Acts 20:35](#)).

The Task of Gifted Leaders

- ▶ It is through the unassuming, overlooked members, that God often chooses to display His power ([1Cor 1:26-27](#)).
- ▶ A leader's role is not to coddle people. It is to equip them to serve ([Eph 4:11-12](#)). God's desire is that all His children serve to their full potential.

Good Shepherds

Leaders will give an account for how they shepherd God's people ([Heb 13:17](#)). Don't think you are exempt because you don't have an official title.

- ▶ Parents should shepherd their children, both physical and spiritual ([Eph 6:4](#)).
- ▶ All of us should teach others what God has taught us ([2Tim 2:2](#)).
- ▶ We should all be making disciples ([Mat 28:19-20](#)).

Traps of Ministry

Here are some traps that can cause you to become distracted, deceived, or depressed.

- ▶ Modifying the message God wants you to deliver because you want to avoid criticism.
- ▶ Comparing yourself to others who appear to be more talented than you are.
- ▶ Letting your popularity make you proud or your lack of popularity make you envious.
- ▶ Striving for church growth to fulfill your own greed.

- ▶ To build ourselves up in love as a church, we must create the space necessary to engage each member ([Eph 4:16](#)).

What are We Producing?

- ▶ The church should produce courageous, hardworking saints, who turn away from false teaching and resist temptation ([Eph 4:13-14](#)).
- ▶ It is weird to call people Christian when they aren't servants. God doesn't give us a free pass on serving ([1Pet 4:10](#), [Jas 4:17](#)).
- ▶ Putting loving pressure on people to serve is not selfish. Serving is the only way they can experience the Holy Spirit as Jesus intended.

The Pastor

- ▶ CHRISTIAN: Scripture warns us to be on guard against false teachers ([2Pet 2:1-3](#)). Our first evaluation should be of ourselves. Have we truly forsaken all to follow Him ([2Cor 13:5](#))?
- ▶ PRAYING: Even Jesus prayed for His followers ([Luke 22:31-32](#)). How intensely do we pray for others?
- ▶ HUMBLE: God champions the humble person who seeks Him ([Jas 4:5-10](#)). Like John the Baptist, do we say, "He must increase, but I must decrease" ([John 3:30](#))?
- ▶ LOVING: How deeply do we love those God has placed under our care ([1The 2:5-12](#))?
- ▶ EQUIPPING: Is our goal to raise up others to pastor others ([Eph 4:11-14](#), [2Tim 2:2](#))?
- ▶ SPIRIT-FILLED: Are we filled with praises for God, always giving thanks ([Eph 5:18-21](#))?
- ▶ MISSIONAL: Are we living the Great Commission ([Mat 28:16-20](#))?

Crucified

True Christians don't just admire Jesus. They follow His example [[Gal 2:20](#), [Luke 14:25-33](#)]. Becoming a Christian is a complete and total surrender of your own desires to the higher purpose of serving God's glory [[Mark 8:34-37](#), [Luke 6:22-23](#)]

What God feels about an issue dwarfs what any human feels [[Rom 3:4](#)]. True compassion considers what the person will feel on judgment day more than

what they feel today [[John 15:18-20](#)]. When we truly understand what Jesus did for us, it becomes a joy to give our lives to Him in return [[Php 3:8-11](#), [1Pet 4:12-14](#)].

Suffering itself is not the point. Our motivation must be love [[1Cor 13:3](#), [1John 3:16-18](#)].

Unleashed

Has the American Church domesticated us to the point where we doubt our power? We need to spend less time catering to the felt needs of people and spend more time praying Paul's prayers in [Ephesians 1](#) and [Ephesians 3](#).

Should we consider that placing people in comfortable classrooms and auditoriums for years may not be the best way to train fearless leaders?

People should be in awe when they see His people with:

- ▶ a peace that passes understanding [[Php 4:7](#)]
- ▶ inexpressible joy [[1Pet 1:8](#)]
- ▶ immeasurable greatness of power [[Eph 1:19](#)]

Church Again

When it comes to your church, don't just copy others. Study the Bible with fresh eyes. Search for what He actually commands. Do what pleases God most. Change anything necessary to be obedient. Following is the current model Francis and his team are using.

What they are striving to produce:

- ▶ Devoted worshippers
- ▶ Loving families
- ▶ Equipped disciple makers
- ▶ Spirit-filled missionaries
- ▶ Suffering sojourners

Practices they have found helpful:

- ▶ Daily Bible readings
- ▶ Meeting in homes (They are keeping the churches small enough to fit in homes.)
- ▶ Multiplying leaders

- ▶ Elder authority
- ▶ Discipling everyone
- ▶ Everyone discipling
- ▶ Everyone exercising their gifts
- ▶ Regular multiplication of churches
- ▶ Simple gatherings
- ▶ Sharing possessions
- ▶ Assuming missions (go as the default)

Francis does not present this list as a prescription. Each of us needs to seek wisdom and direction from God. Never underestimate how vulnerable you will feel when you see His face. Keep that final moment in mind as you make decisions [[Heb 10:37-39](#)].

Jesus is coming. Consider the warnings to the Church in [Revelation 2-3](#). Don't blindly follow anyone or anything but God and His Word. Surrender everything to Him.

Surviving Arrogance

- ▶ The Church would become more attractive if observers could see His humility in us (**John 5:19, John 12:49-50**).
- ▶ Ministering to negative people in humility and grace won't ensure growth in their lives, but it will in your life (**Jas 1:2-4**).
- ▶ Just because someone says something with the wrong attitude doesn't mean the information is wrong (**2Sam 16:9-13**). Although we should not condone angry criticism, we should set an example of humility.
- ▶ It would be easier to avoid difficult people; however, God commands us to bear with the failings of the weak (**Rom 15:1-3**).
- ▶ The time to put your foot down is when people cause divisiveness (**Titus 3:10-11**). We must be compassionate while obeying Scripture (**Mat 18:15-17, 1Cor 5**).
- ▶ We naturally want to comfort those who weep; however, we must love them enough to help them leave their pity parties. Their focus should be on God rather than themselves (**2Cor 7:8-10**).
- ▶ Control your thoughts (**Php 4:8**).
- ▶ When you feel mistreated, start worshipping Jesus (**Heb 12:2**).
- ▶ Know that He dwells with those of a contrite and lowly spirit (**Isa 57:15**).