

The Irresistible Church

12 Traits of a Church Heaven Applauds
by Wayne Cordeiro

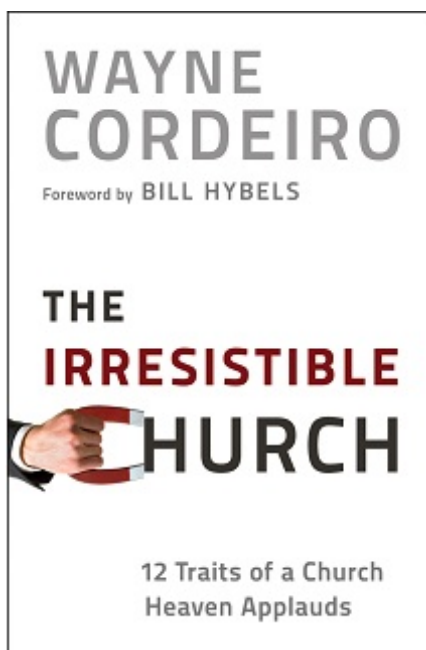
A Book Review by Jack De Vries

I found the sub-title of Wayne Cordeiro's latest book a bit cheesy. You might think that this is a book describing a church that is irresistible to *people*. But primarily, this book is about becoming a church that is irresistible to *heaven*. I began to picture God in heaven putting his hands together in applause – over a church. This picture messes with my understanding of God, the church, human depravity, and divine sovereignty.

On the other hand, the sub-title tweaked my interest. I began wondering, "What is the point of this book?" I have been enriched by other things Cordeiro has written.¹ And for more than 25 years Cordeiro has been planting and pastoring churches in Hawaii. These churches are growing and impacting the lives of thousands of people.

So what does Cordeiro mean when he writes about a church becoming irresistible to heaven ... to God? When you begin reading this book you soon realise that Cordeiro's book is about becoming a church that God will

use in incredible ways, a church that God will bless. This resonates with me. In my three decades of ministry I have noticed some churches that just seem to thrive – churches that God seems to use for his glory and the expansion of the gospel. There are other churches that are in serious decay, that seem to only have a whisper of life left in them. And there are churches everywhere between those two spectrums. The purpose of Cordeiro's book is to help churches thrive, to become churches that God blesses and uses for his eternal purposes.



Worth reading? Absolutely. It is well written and illustrated by real stories, many of them personal stories from Cordeiro's years of pastoral experience. This is not a book written in some ivory tower; Cordeiro is a practitioner, actively engaged in the throes of church life. Whether you're a pastor, layleader, or person in the pew, as Bill Hybels writes in the forward to *The Irresistible Church*, "this book contains well-proven principles that when applied will become breakthrough ideas to take your church to the next level of effectiveness." (10)

Cordeiro begins by identifying what an irresistible church looks like. It is a church that looks something like this:

- ▶ You grow spiritually at this church
- ▶ You witness a strong sense of mission
- ▶ You long to go to this church every week

¹The other books I have read are *The Divine Mentor* and *Leading on Empty*

- ▶ You want to invest in this church for the long haul
- ▶ You tell others about this church
- ▶ You relax at this church, knowing it's a model of growth, not perfection
- ▶ You are delightfully challenged at this church (13-14)

I began to ask myself whether or not these bullet points describe the church my wife and I attend. I thought of the churches I partner with in Australia. To be honest, as churches, we are not as effective as we can be in impacting our society with the gospel. As Cordeiro writes, "Irresistible church are champions at leading people closer to God, being conduits for the Holy Spirit to change lives for the better and impact society for good.... A church must be a place where disciples gather – and then *scatter*.... Living a life well stewarded is our responsibility and our opportunity." (22) I concluded that most churches would really benefit from a study of *The Irresistible Church*.

Cordeiro identifies twelve (12) traits of what he calls an irresistible church:

1. *Hungers for the Presence of God*
2. *Remembers Who She Is*
3. *Lives Heart First*
4. *Practices Gratefulness*
5. *Promotes Healthy Relationships*
6. *Is Always Learning*
7. *Promotes Spiritual Self-Feeding*
8. *Connects Everything to a Soul*
9. *Chooses to Love*
10. *Takes Risks*
11. *Humbles Itself*
12. *Has a Plan*

I appreciate where Cordeiro begins – he begins with God. If there is any mark of a healthy or effective church, it is exactly this: a church hungers for the presence of God more than anything, and as Cordeiro adds: "– more than spacious facilities, cutting-edge

programs, large attendance, big budgets, or rain-free days." (27) God needs to be at the center of everything we do. Alluding to Abraham Lincoln's prayer – "Without you, Lord ... [we] must fail" ought to be the prayer of our churches. (28) Cordeiro suggests three actions a church can undertake to increase their hunger for the presence of God: (1)

Recognize the vacuum; (2) Fill the vacuum with what is righteous; and (3) Purposely exhibit tangible, visible signs of faith. (28-31) I found the first two suggestions more helpful than the third. I believe tangible, visible signs of faith are more than keeping "a church's mission statement where everybody can

see it – on walls, on letterheads, on Web sites" as Cordeiro suggests. There are better ways to increase people's hunger for God. In ages past Christians used stained glass windows to tell the Biblical story and increase a sense of the holy in worship spaces. In my previous church we used banners, art, and other creative means to assist people in their awe of God and all that is holy, just, and pure. As churches we ought to do whatever we can to help people hunger after God, in the words of the Sons of Korah, "as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul pants for the God, for the living God." (Psalm 24:1,2)

I also appreciated the second trait Cordeiro mentions – an irresistible church remembers who she is. Cordeiro is correct when he writes, "When a church is busy, it often believes it's doing the right thing. A church can be filled with activity....But if all that activity doesn't lead to spiritual transformation, a church is focused on the wrong initiatives.... The true end of a church is to influence society so that people come to Christ and lives are transformed." (41) Enough said! The church is never an end in itself; it is a means to an end.

Without you Lord ...
I must fail.
-Abraham Lincoln

The fifth trait also deserves honourable mention: healthy relationships. For me, this is a given – given right in Scripture, Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in a bond of peace.” Or as Cordeiro echos: “It’s when a church promotes and encourages a sense of unity in the bond of love. Possessing this trait doesn’t mean everyone in a church always agrees with everyone else or that there are never any problems. It simply means that when problems do occur we take the time and effort to resolve them in a timely manner.” (69) Absolutely essential for a church that God blesses and uses for eternal purposes!

Let us always connect
everything to a soul,
and help people find
their way to Christ.

Another key trait of an irresistible church that Cordeiro mentions, which I believe is essential, is “always learning.” He writes: “an irresistible church chooses to constantly learn and adapt. The church recognizes change as the currency of constantly shifting society, and what worked yesterday to minister to that society may not always work today.... God knows that once people stop learning new things, they stop growing.” (78) As hard as change might be, thriving church are always learning, always seeking ways to adapt to a rapidly changing society. Cordeiro’s warning is also needed: “An irresistible church does not change for change’s sake alone. The main emphasis is never placed on being relevant, current, or ‘cool.’ Rather, we must choose to change because God uses the agent of change for His good.” (78)

Volunteers in churches ought to read the eighth chapter: An Irresistible Church Connects Everything to a Soul. But not just volunteers – in fact, everybody. The idea of connecting everything to a soul “means every function of the church is connected to the mission of somehow, somewhere, saving the lost and helping people grow in the faith.... God invites us to love, serve, and obey Him,

and part of the adventure of following Him means that we get to have a hand in helping people find their way to the Lord.” (100) Cordeiro shares several stories of how they do that at his church, New Hope. They assist everybody to see their link in helping lead people to Christ and nurture them in the faith. They deliberately look at every function of their church through the grid of their mission.

The final chapter seems a bit displaced in the context of the rest of *The Irresistible Church*. This chapter deals with churches having a plan. Perhaps there is no intentional order of priority in the twelve traits identified by Cordeiro, but this one I would have highlighted upfront. Too many church simply fail because they fail to plan. Little is done intentionally. Most is done reactively. I have found that healthy, effective, and thriving churches do the hard work of planning. They spend much time in prayer. They study God’s Word. They also study the culture in which they live. And they plan. They strategize. They work according to that plan. And as Cordeiro reminds us, “the more sharply focused our target, the more apt we will be to hit it.” (148)

The study guide at the end of the book is a good way to benefit most from *The Irresistible Church*. This study guide will get you into Scripture and assist putting into action the twelve traits of an irresistible church. Take a bunch of leaders or a Bible study group through this study guide and just see what God will do.

While most of *The Irresistible Church* resonates with me there is another part that makes me feel somewhat unsettled. After I read this book I came away with the idea that the future of the church is all about us – me – people! Cordeiro states: “The exciting news is that *you* have the power to help create the irresistible church you long to be part of.... We

have the power to create irresistible churches, because *we* are the church.” (15) But the longer I am in the ministry the more I am convinced that a healthy, thriving, even irresistible church, is more of a bi-product than something we produce. I am reminded of Jesus’ words, “I will build the church....” (Matthew 16:18) Not me, not us, but Jesus! He will build the church. In my devotions today I was reminded of the words of Hans Kung: “The Church begins, not with a pious individual, but with God.” It is God who “gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith.” (Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 21) When we hunger after God, keep the gospel central, delight in the Word of God, and are fervent in prayer – the result is a thriving and growing community of believers we call the church. But it begins with God; Jesus builds the church; the Spirit gives it life; and we are humble instruments in the Master’s hands. The church is not about us; it is all about our loving God and faithful Saviour! Find a bunch of people with that focus, and you will find an irresistible church.

About the Author:



Wayne Cordeiro is founder and senior pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship in Honolulu, Hawaii, one of the fastest growing churches in the USA. Wayne is an author, songwriter, and highly sought after conference speaker around the world. His books include *Leading on Empty*, *The Divine Mentor*, and *Doing Church*

as a Team. He is a church planter at heart and has helped to plant over 100 churches in the Pacific Rim. Wayne and his wife, Anna, live in Honolulu, and have three grown children.