

REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

WAYNE CORDEIRO

DOING  
CHURCH  
AS A TEAM

THE MIRACLE OF TEAMWORK

AND HOW IT TRANSFORMS CHURCHES

DOING  
CHURCH  
*as a*  
TEAM

WAYNE  
CORDEIRO



BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Bethany House edition published 2015  
ISBN 978-0-7642-1449-3

2004 Revised and expanded edition. Previously published by Regal Books

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2014955677

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No one stands alone. In my life, dozens of people have given me input and inspiration for this book. I have been mentored by scores of wonderful people who may never win a prize or get their names in print. These are my silent heroes—men and women who have jewel-studded crowns awaiting them from the One they so willingly serve.

Thank you, wonderful New Hope family of churches all over the world. We have chosen to live life together as collaborators. You are my family. To the hundreds of volunteers who put their hands to the plow and have never looked back, thank you.

Thank you, my publishing partners at Regal, who have been so supportive in all my endeavors.

Great gratitude and love also go to my dear wife, Anna, and my children, Amy, Aaron and Abigail, from whom I have learned so much. I have so much yet to learn, but with your love and support, I will never give up! Each one of you is a gift to my life.

I have no greater joy than to team up with thousands of churches as together we make a difference. The *Life Journals* bring us closer to our Master, and *Doing Church as a Team* will bring us closer to our calling as saints on this spinning globe.

I n t r o d u c t i o n

# A PRAYER ANSWERED?

I have often wrestled with the fact that if the Word of God indeed is powerful, then why does the average church in America have fewer than 100 people in attendance every Sunday morning? Also, though violent crime has declined in many places, the prison population in America has dramatically risen by 500 percent since 1975.<sup>1</sup> With more than 300,000 churches in the United States, why haven't we done better?

I know we can.

I believe that if we join hearts and hands and learn from each other, we can bring this country back from the brink. But we have to work together.

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Southern California, once quipped, "I offered a man an idea to try, but he declined and told me in no uncertain terms that he was going to either be original or nothing . . . so he became both."

My dear friend Tom Paterson described it like this, with a gleam in his eye: "If I have one good idea, and you have one good idea, how many ideas does each of us have? One. Now, if I share my idea with you and you share yours with me, how many does each one now have? *Two!* You see, if we share our ideas with each other, we have immediately doubled our knowledge. Have you lost your own idea? No! You still have it. But by sharing ideas, we have increased our knowledge 100 percent."

*You never dim the light of your own candle by lighting that of another.*

I often pray that we will always remain learners. The Greek word for “disciple” (*mathetes*), in fact, comes from the verb *mathano*, “to learn.” Humility and teachability are the crown jewels of all the qualities of a leader whom God will use in the twenty-first century. When we stop learning, we just stop.

Jigoro Kano understood this. He founded the art of judo and became the highest-ranking black belt in this world-renowned sport. Nearing his death, Kano made one last request of his students. He asked that they bury him wearing a white belt, the symbol of a beginner, a learner.

May we learn God’s design for His people and begin to respect and appreciate each other’s giftings!

I for one am learning that I cannot be fulfilled apart from other people. In fact, the bottom line of this book is this: *You can’t do it alone*. If you want to be a successful leader—if you plan to have a successful ministry—then you must develop not only your gifts but also the gifts of those around you. If you give your life away, you’ll end up discovering what life is all about.

The ideas in *Doing Church as a Team* are more than just the accumulation of 30 years in ministry. I have included lessons learned from making hundreds of mistakes as well as gems gleaned from observing many wonderful churches and leaders in action.

This book is written for both pastors and members of congregations who have a deep desire to make a difference with their lives. I pray you’ll come away motivated and inspired in your walk with the Lord, encouraged to keep reaching for God’s very best. It is written for leaders who, like myself, have found the status quo unacceptable. At times I will address my comments to pastors and, at other times, to volunteer leaders. But in the final analysis, these truths apply to every person and every church in every denomination.

Finally, this isn't a book on how to make your church more like our church, or how to adopt another congregation's style. Instead, it is a book on how to become more like the person or church Jesus created *you* to be. We must learn from each other, and if we do, we'll be miles closer to becoming all God desires for us.

Just before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, He prayed a remarkable prayer for the church He founded. He asked His Father, "that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" (John 17:21, *KJV*).

I often notice that, as Christians, we constantly ask God to answer our prayers. There's nothing inherently wrong with that; He invites our prayers and is so faithful to answer them. But after reading this verse, I thought, *Wouldn't it be nice if, just for once, we could answer one of HIS prayers?*

Doing church as a team is one of the ways we can do that. That's what this book is all about. After all, He has answered hundreds of billions of our prayers. Now maybe we can finally answer one of His.

## Note

1. Charles Colson, "Not Out of the Woods: Why Crime Is Falling," *BreakPoint with Chuck Colson*, broadcast February 10, 1999. Transcript is available on the Internet at <http://www.breakpoint.org>.



C h a p t e r 1

# REACHING FOR GOD'S BEST

*This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:  
“I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who  
directs you in the way you should go.”*

ISAIAH 48:17, NIV

Nestled between the two mountains of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, Hilo is one of the most beautiful cities in the Hawaiian Islands. Eastward lies a natural bay that welcomed some of the first missionaries to Hawaii. Located at the foot of these two imposing mountains, Hilo receives constant rain showers, giving it title to the wettest city in the United States, with an average annual rainfall of more than 120 inches.

Hilo also has some of the most beautiful people in the world. They are fun-loving, relationship-oriented men and women with much *aloha*, or love, for one another. They enjoy

sports, fishing, eating, music and laughter.

One of the more popular sports on the islands is canoe paddling. In this sport, six paddlers make up the engine room for an outrigger canoe of the type that traversed the islands more than 200 years ago. Although navigating one of these ancient canoes may look like child's play, the actual technique requires much more than meets the eye.

One summer, six of us from the church received an invitation to compete as a crew in an upcoming canoe race. We were game for something new, so we accepted the invitation and immediately sought out a canoe instructor from a nearby club. We started our first lesson in a lake of brackish water. Our instructor sat astride the nose of the canoe, facing us as he called out signals and instructions. Once we took our places, the first lesson began.

"OK, everyone!" he yelled. "This is how you hold a paddle." Then he modeled the correct form. As we figured out which end we were supposed to grasp, and with which hand, he continued to instruct us.

"We're going to paddle our first stretch of water. It will be an eighth-of-a-mile sprint. When I begin the stopwatch and say 'Go!' just paddle as fast and as hard as you can. When we cross the finish line, I'll notify you. That's when you can stop paddling. Got it?"

*How hard can this be? I thought. Even children paddle canoes. This ought to be a breeze!* Just then, the sharp call of our coach shattered my self-confident thoughts.

"Ho`omakaukau? I mua!"

In English, that means, "Ready? Go forward!"

With our muscles bulging and sinews stretched, we burst out of our dead-in-the-water starting position like a drowning elephant trying to get air. We thrashed the water with our paddles on either side of the canoe. Not knowing when to switch from one side to the other, we all figured it made sense to switch when

one arm got tired. So, firing at will, I crossed the blade of my oar over and across the canoe; and when I did, I scraped the back of my fellow paddler seated directly in front of me. He grunted as my oar etched a red mark across his spine. But neither of us stopped. We just kept wildly flailing our arms like amateur ice skaters trying to regain their balance. We were on a crusade!

Yet soon it felt as if hours had elapsed. My arms began to feel heavy as lead and my lungs felt on fire. My teammate's back had started to bleed, and water had filled our canoe halfway to the top. The elephant was beginning to drown when we finally heard our coach say, "OK, stop!"

*Thank God!* I thought. We abandoned the sinking canoe and let our bodies slump into the water, totally exhausted.

"One minute, forty-two seconds," our coach called out. "Pretty sad!"

Like war-torn warriors, we comforted each other, apologizing for the scrapes and wounds inflicted by our flailing paddles. We started bailing water out of the lumbering canoe, which by now looked more like a listing submarine than a sleek racing vessel.

Coach gathered us whimpering novices together and, after sharing a few basics about safety, taught us how to paddle as a team. Each fledgling paddler was to mirror the man in front of him, and everyone was to move in time with the lead stroker. Coach taught us how to switch our paddles to the opposite hand without injuring each other. We practiced together again and again until our stroking became as rhythmic as a metronome. We were beginning to look good! After a few practice runs, Coach took us back to our original starting position.

"All right," he said, "let's try that same eighth-mile stretch again! Only this time, I want you to stroke as if you were taking a leisurely stroll through the park. No sprinting. Just mirror the one in front of you and switch with a smooth cadence of

rhythm, just as you were taught. Stroke as a team. Feel the movement of the canoe. It's sort of like riding a skateboard. Once you get it going, you just nurse the glide. And don't try to break any sound barriers this time, OK?"

With new confidence, we took our mark. Coach barked out the starting signal.

*"Ho`omakaukau? I mua!"*

Our oars silently entered the water, coordinated in perfect time. Our canoe cut through the water like a knife through jelly. We switched sides without skipping a beat. We each mirrored the rower in front of us. Somehow, in just a few minutes, we had been transformed from a drowning circus animal into a precision machine! Then, just as we began to feel the exhilaration of our smooth progress, our jubilant coach yelled, "OK! Stop paddling!"

This ahead-of-expected arrival caught all of us by surprise.

"Anybody tired?"

We all shook our heads no.

Coach held up his stopwatch so that we could see the truth. Then he exclaimed, "You beat your last time by twenty-four seconds!"

We couldn't believe it. Nobody injured? No one overboard? No one exhausted enough to keel over? No canoe deluged with water? No fire in my lungs?

In sheer delight, we congratulated each other, gave a few victory shouts, exchanged leis and took pictures. This was amazing!

And we did it *together*. We had paddled as a team.

## As Old As the Bible

Doing church as a team is not an innovative concept. In fact, it is as old as the Bible itself (but I hope to describe teamwork in more contemporary terms).

This approach to “doing church” lies at the very heart and passion of an amazing church in Honolulu called New Hope Christian Fellowship of Oahu—our tenth pioneer work since 1984. Within nine years of establishment, the congregation’s average attendance on Sunday mornings has risen to 10,500. More than 26,000 people have made first-time commitments to follow Christ, and more than 4,000 of those people have been baptized.

The church outgrew me in its first month. If it weren’t for the outstanding servants whom God brought there to serve, I am sure I would have been locked away in the mental ward of a state institution by now (perhaps some people feel I should be admitted anyway!). Because of our accelerated growth, doing church as a team was almost a necessity.

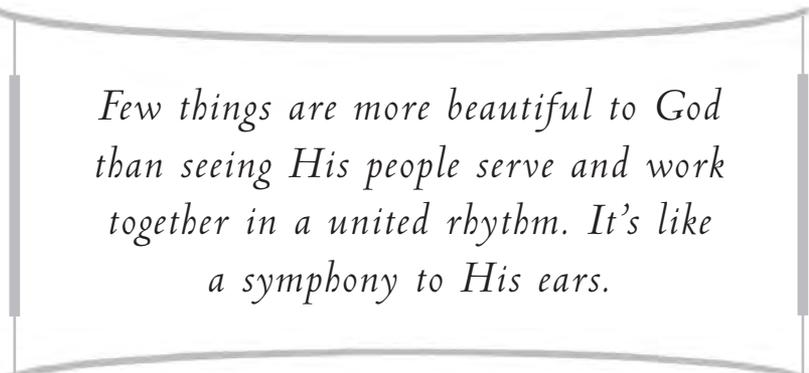
I think I saw it all come together for the first time at a 1996 Christmas Eve service. We put on a program filled with multimedia presentations, dance, mime, drama, a 100-voice choir with smaller ensembles—I mean, the works. The auditorium filled up with more than 1,200 people, many of whom had come for the very first time. I stood just offstage, watching the evening unfold.

During the prior year, our first year in Oahu, we had seen more than 1,400 people open their hearts to Christ. Whenever you gather so many new believers in one place, you will have fire! The evening’s music erupted with a song of magnificent celebration. Dancers burst onto the stage, expressing their exuberance with cartwheels and twists. A former university cheerleader came bounding across the platform with flips and somersaults. Others got tossed into the air for the finale, and the auditorium broke into applause. (One girl flew so high, we haven’t heard from her since!)

Sometime during this program, it hit me. As I watched our outstanding keyboardist play the piano with all his heart, I thought, *He is preaching the gospel the best way he knows how—through his piano!*

Nearby, the drummer played the drums with his usual excellence. He seemed to be playing more with his heart than with drumsticks. That night I said to myself, *Our drummer is preaching the gospel the best way he knows how—through his drums!*

When I looked into the radiant faces of the choir, I saw many lives that had been recently transformed by the Lord's grace, and I thought, *Those wonderful people are all preaching the gospel the best way they know how—through their singing!*



*Few things are more beautiful to God than seeing His people serve and work together in a united rhythm. It's like a symphony to His ears.*

The mime, the drama team and the ensemble all preached the gospel through their own gifts.

Then I noticed the stage coordinators moving with poise and rhythm, rearranging microphones and straightening cords. I saw our video people running the cameras. I looked out over the audience and observed the ushers greeting people with genuine enthusiasm. I spotted the faces of various individuals who had brought along friends and neighbors. All these people were preaching the gospel through their particular gifts, passions and talents.

At the end of a memorable program, I walked out onto the platform, picked up a microphone and wrapped up the evening with a simple presentation of the gospel. I, too, preached the gospel the best way I knew how, through my own gift. But I wasn't doing it alone. We were all doing it together! We were all

preaching the gospel the best way we knew how—through our gifts. And that included the children’s workers, the parking lot team and everyone who had worked behind the scenes to make this evening happen. Every single person had a part. I saw this event not merely as one presentation of the gospel but as several hundred presentations of the gospel—all at the same time in one evening. That’s what made it so powerful!

That night I started to see the truth clearly, and a brand-new understanding of how beautiful the Body of Christ can be flooded my soul.

We were starting to do church as a team!

Although I had been in ministry for more than two decades, this experience made me more certain than ever that I knew much less than I thought I did. Yet through all of our trials and struggles, God formed a diamond and fashioned a gem.

Today, my heart’s desire is to deposit the truths I have learned in Hawaii into your account.

## Designed for Each Other

God would never have given us the Great Commission—to go into all the world and preach the gospel—if He never had intended for us to actually move forward. Peter tells us that the Lord is not willing “for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). God would not say such a thing if it were not possible.

We are all called into this great work, but none of us can do it alone. No pastor can single-handedly fulfill such a calling, regardless of how gifted he may be. Unless every one of us catches the fire, in the long run we will lack any warmth against the chill of this present age.

Few things are more beautiful to God than seeing His people serve and work together in a united rhythm. It’s like a symphony

to His ears. That's how we were created to function. God designed us to need each other. To reach our communities, much less the world, we need every ministry doing its part and every congregation excitedly doing church as a team.

## Stroking Together for a Purpose

Just like paddling a canoe, God designed His people to stroke together for a purpose. He has designed each church with a special purpose, and He plans to saturate the carrying out of that purpose with joy. In order for this to happen, God has given each of us a unique gift. The combination of our gifts working in sync should give off such a joyful radiance that the whole world stands up and takes notice.

God has given each of us a paddle—a gift, a calling. And like the paddlers in a canoe, each of us has a vital place to serve or a unique role to fill. On each paddle is our unique thumbprint, our own individual circuitry, designed by God Himself. He places each of us in a community—more specifically, a local church—with a divine purpose. He fits us alongside others with a similar assignment and calls us a family, a team, the Church. No one person is called to carry out this assignment alone; God didn't design it that way. He created us to do church as a team!

A full symphony under the direction of a master conductor will always sound infinitely better than a one-man band. As we discover and develop our individual gifts and learn to stroke in rhythm as a team, we will be astonished at how much further and faster we go—and with far fewer injuries!

Now, continue with me on an adventure that can transform churches. It will renovate your thinking like it did mine.

*“Ho`omakaukau? I mua!”* (Ready? Let's go forward!)

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## Team Preparation

1. What seems more similar to your experience of church, Wayne's first try at paddling the canoe, or his second? Why?
  2. What does the phrase, "doing church as a team," mean to you right now? What images come to mind?
  3. Read Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Peter 3:9. What do these verses suggest to you about the mission of your church? What do they suggest about doing church as a team?
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