

## Opinion

## Stanley's 'Irresistible' an entertaining and enjoyable read

*"And while most people outside the church continue to have a favorable view of Jesus, they don't necessarily have a favorable view of his body, the church. That's a problem." — Andy Stanley, from his book, "Irresistible."*

Two things stand out about Andy Stanley's book "Irresistible."

First, it's the message, which has been arguably controversial, especially in Christian book circles. Second, it's the writing, which is as entertaining as it is substantive.

For those of you who are Andy Stanley 'fans', this will come as no surprise. For those who have not read an Andy Stanley book, you should consider it (regardless of your religious views, or lack of them) as it

will make you both think and feel.

A little background about Andy Stanley. He's the founder of Northpoint Community Church in Alpharetta. It is the centerpiece of eight churches in the Atlanta area, where their average attendance is nearly 40,000 people per week. Stanley's church, with humble beginnings in 1995, is now the second largest church in the United States, behind only Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas.

Stanley radiates leadership—and a different kind of evangelism.

He has written more than 20 books, with titles that include "Love, Sex and Dating", "Better Decisions, Fewer Regrets", "Enemies of the Heart" and, perhaps the most controversial book of them all, "Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World."

If you are a person who has tired of organized religion, feeling that the church is either no longer relevant or that it is too judgmental and filled with hypocrisy, you should give Stanley a try. He is not like any other evangelist you have ever heard or, in this case, read.

Stanley is a leader who arrived just in time to meet the chaos, anxiety and uncertainty that permeates American society.

Cerebral but approachable, decisive but humble, this slim, 65-year-old is a Baptist preacher's kid who grew into one of the visionary thought-leaders of American culture. A man who talks faster than many of us can think, Stanley has become the enigmatic leader of a generation looking for something different.

Here's the way Stanley characterized how the apostles must have reacted when Jesus announced (at the Last Supper) that a "new covenant" was coming:

*"Did he really say the new covenant? As in the one predicted by Jeremiah six hundred years earlier? If that was the case, then this really was big. Maybe not as epic as the nation's exodus out of Egypt, but big nonetheless."*

This book is filled with Stanley's insightful (and ceaselessly clever) characterizations of how the Apostles (and Jesus) might have reacted to events in today's language. He refers to the Apostles as "the boys", who were sometimes more concerned about what was in this for them, rather than for others.

Stanley continues: "The inauguration of the new covenant explains why most Christians don't mind a little bacon with their eggs. It explains why you can't get either at Chick-fil-A on Sunday. If we were still taking our marching orders from Moses, they would be closed on Saturday. Perish the thought."

This book is not his father's Chevrolet. Stanley, the son of the late Charles Stanley who built a national reputation as leader of Atlanta First Baptist Church, will quote C.S. Lewis, Tim Keller, N.T. Wright and other Christian scholars, but has written a book that we can all understand. An old co-worker of mine used to say to get a message across you have to "get it down to where the goats could get at it." Stanley does just that.

In *Irresistible*, Stanley breaks from "traditional" teaching and advocates that people move beyond the Old Testament and focus only on the life and teachings of Jesus in the New Testament.

The title of his book represents his advocacy of a return to the "irresistible" faith that was created during the life of Jesus and the years that followed. He says that while the Old Testament represented a covenant between God and the Jewish people (or, specifically, Abraham), the New Testament was a covenant between Jesus and all people.

It is here that Stanley has created a discussion in the church, and he pitches his tent in favor of a God of love (New Testament) over a God of fear (Old Testament).

Stanley, who preaches in jeans and open collar shirts, writes that while we can and should be "inspired" by those stories in the Old Testament, it is the New Testament that allows the only true foundation for spiritual growth.

He also strongly advises that Christians (and even Christian ministers) to stop using the phrase "The Bible says..." and instead start saying "Jesus says" or "Paul wrote" and give credit to those who were responsible for witnessing first-hand the irresistible faith that was spread in the first and second centuries.

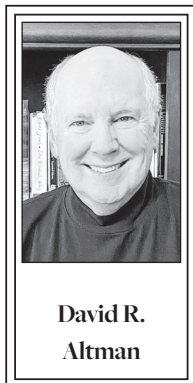
In case you're wondering, I do not attend Stanley's church—and I don't personally know anyone who does. But my pastor quotes him often, as do many theologians who may not necessarily share his views but respect his insight and courage.

Stanley's sermons and podcasts, part of his extraordinary Northpoint Ministries, have forged an almost cult-like popularity among Christians (and non-Christians) who are looking for something that is missing in their spiritual lives.

Stanley's message focuses on creating new Jesus followers with an engaging style that welcomes the curious and praises the faithful.

One more thing about "Irresistible". It's an enjoyable read. Stanley's uber-conversational writing is a testament as much to his communication skills as it is to his inspiring faith.

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