

## TENTMAKING THAT LEADS TO CHURCH PLANTING

*“Do tentmakers plant churches?”* is a question I am often asked. As a missiologist and a businessman, I have found that tentmakers not only plant churches, but there are many similarities between church planting and doing business. Consider, what is ‘needed’ to plant a church? Stated in its most simple form the first three ingredients are: God, money and people. What is needed to start a business? For a soldier of Christ, the answer is the same God, money, and people. Clearly the world-view of an individual affects his/her perception and application of the connectedness and effectiveness of these 3 pillars of tentmaking. Yet, if we are to be effective church planting tentmakers we need to understand how to integrate them into our life and work.

### GOD

Having a right understanding of both God and money is a wide yet essential concept to grasp and apply. About God we need to understand and apply the fact that God owns the bank and does not need money to accomplish His purposes in both ministry and business. About money we need to understand and apply that money is a tool and nothing more. Understanding is one thing yet applying these ideas is clearly another. We all make claim to understanding that the source of money is God. Certainly we all acknowledge this in our thinking and words but too often our actions fall short. I have seen many of God’s children fail to realize as His children, we are His heirs and that He owns the bank. This is most clearly expressed in the fears tentmakers have that their business may be jeopardized by their witnessing and church planting efforts. If the reason we set up a school, business or NGO is in obedience to God’s mandate to reach the people, then why once the business is established do we hesitate to boldly proclaim the Gospel through the relationships and opportunities it provides? The reason we hesitate is we do not understand that money is a tool, nor do we believe that God owns the bank. We fail to work and act as God being the CEO of our business. This has nothing to do with money, but everything to do with ministry. Money will affect how we make business decisions, but it should not affect our evangelistic and church planting efforts.

Good tentmakers realize God is the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of their company and they report to Him daily (Luke 9:23) as they would any other CEO. We need to honestly ask ourselves, who owns our job or business? Most tentmakers will state their job or business belongs to God, but too often this is not reflected in the operations and specifically the evangelistic outreach being done through the business. This is connected to the lack of risk many tentmakers are willing to take in sharing the Gospel with employees and clients. We need to take more risks in sharing our faith. If I ever hesitate to share the Gospel with anyone for fear it would place our business at risk, then I believe I have sinned against the Master. If I have sinned against the Master, then who is the real owner of the business? Is it any wonder the business and church planting work both are suffering? This does not mean I don’t take severe precautions to protect the secular work and identity of the business, I do. But when it comes to sharing the Gospel with the lost, we each need to count whatever gain we have as lost. (Philippians 3:7-9) The foundation of all tentmaking jobs and business is evangelism and church planting. To withhold

sharing the Gospel to protect our jobs, identity, personal safety, or longevity in the country is to cancel out the reason Jesus sent us overseas in the first place.

Some may argue that when a boss directs that witnessing be not allowed on the job that we should obey our boss. I would counter that we should never have taken such a job in the first place. How can I separate my faith from any aspect of my life? When we hesitate to risk/lose our jobs or business for the sake of the Gospel, who are we serving? God or mammon? (Matthew 6:19-24) We need to live and witness as if Jesus and not the authorities are in power. (John 19:10-11) We need to understand that both money and our jobs are simply tools to accomplish the Master's purposes both in and through us. Having a right perspective of God and money is the first pillar of effective tentmaking. Not only understand, but also live and work with Jesus as the true CEO of our company, NGO or school.

### MONEY

Historically the church has reflected if not taught, that God's position towards money is that "money is the root of all kinds of evil." This misunderstanding of 1 Timothy 6:10, has led many church leaders to treat money as evil. Though everyone recognizes that money is needed to build God's church, we rightly fear the temptations it brings. On the one hand we petition God for finances while on the other hand we treat with contempt His answer to those prayers – that being the money. Truly, "Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief's." (1 Timothy 6:10) However, it is the "love" of money and not money itself that the Master says is a "root of all kinds of evil." Gaining a right perspective of God and how He uses money is the first pillar to successful tentmaking; the second pillar is utilizing money as tool to accomplish His purposes.

Jesus commands us to ask God to "give us today our daily bread." Surely He is powerful enough to supply our daily bread without money. We all know how God turned the dew into bread, and had bakery trucks break down at George Muller's doorstep. Though He at times works in such miraculous ways, often He also works through less recognized miracles like having someone slip a twenty-dollar bill into our pockets. Have you ever thought about what that twenty is? A gift from God? – Yes. But it's the intention of the giver, which is the gift, not the twenty-dollar bill itself. Whether the money comes via a gift, or the hard work you have done to win a contract, that money is simply a tool that God uses to accomplish His will.

This is a key attitude for tentmakers to grasp; "money is a tool and nothing more." Money is to a businessman as a rake is to a gardener or a toothbrush to a dentist. Money enables us to do our work. To view money as anything other than a tool is to make an idol of it. I have seen pastors and missionaries "pleading" with God for money as if the money would make a difference in their ministry or lives. Money does not make a difference, God does. Good tentmakers understand this and thus build their business on God's principles and not their paychecks. This may seem like an obvious principle, but I have met many tentmakers (most are struggling) who did not invite God into each step of

their research, business plan, fund raising, set up and daily operations of the business. We need to honestly involve God in all we do. We need to keep our focus on Him and not money. If a gardener breaks a rake or dentist loses a toothbrush, they hardly give it a second thought; they simply go get another one. When we can view money as replaceable as a rake or a toothbrush, we've come a long way toward understanding God and how God views money as a simple tool to accomplish His objectives. We will realize that if He wishes to have us witness resulting in His loss of the company, that's His business and not ours. Having this proper view of money will give us freedom in doing business and boldness in sharing the Gospel.

## PEOPLE

Whether we are talking buying or selling, preaching or discipling, teaching or learning, the Lord's work IS people. Both nationals and team members operate our businesses. When starting a business the nationals you hire or the team members you recruit to work the business will ultimately have more bearing on your success in ministry than the business itself. Setting up a business which is right for your city and provides access to your people group is important, but not as important as the team (expats and/or locals) who work your business. Having the right people, with the right training, in the right positions is the third pillar to positioning yourself to succeed in both your tentmaking and church-planting ministry.

Our research and experience shows there are four factors which make a difference in who should work for you, and how they should work, whether that be team members or nationals working in your NGO, school, or business.

1. Accountability - After reviewing hundreds of surveys from tentmakers in the 10-40 Window, the most important factor in the success of a tentmaker's ministry is accountability. Tentmakers in effect are holding down two jobs, one of a business professional, and one of a missionary. Balancing the duties of both jobs while maintaining a strong walk with God and a good family life is beyond the ability of most people. We need to recognize our need for help. Tentmakers need mentors who are watching over them and holding them accountable in their ministry and personal life. These mentors must provide help in balancing our lives between bearing fruit that will last (churches) and fruit that will perish (the business). This is not an article on leadership, but good leadership goes hand in hand with successful tentmaking. We need to give both our team members and national employees a clear understanding of the big picture with adequate supervision and incentives. In doing our recent "Team Member Survey" just 2 out of 17 team members did not feel they had an adequate understanding of the big picture. That may sound encouraging, but it scared me. For if there is one sheep among the flock that is lost, he's likely to lead others astray. We need to continually upgrade our leadership skills, so that we are adequately equipped to serve our team members and employees. We must hold them in close but loving accountability to each task they are assigned and in every aspect of their character. I believe too many team leaders focus more on their own performance than that of their team members. We need to grasp the fact that investing time in the health and goodwill of the sheep is much

more effective than going off to hunt wolves. If I can make 17 others more effective, I now have 17 shepherds and hunters, not just one. On the other hand we also have team leaders who are “nice,” not wishing to call balls and strikes lest someone strike out. We let them swing at pitch after pitch, while the rest of the team waits patiently for them to connect. There are various styles and preferences on how to set goals and keep people accountable. We need to know our sheep and hold them accountable in ways that they will respond to. Likewise, if we desire to see our tentmaking job plant churches, we need someone in our life who loves us enough to hold us tightly accountable in all areas of our life and ministry. Note tentmakers rarely need accountability in their job. The boss or the business will hold itself accountable by the nature of its bottom line. It is our family, spiritual life and ministry that need watching over.

2. Focus - Another essential factor is keeping team members focused on church planting and not simply doing the business. A NGO, school, or business may provide great access to the people, but if the team members are not evangelistic in their words and ways when relating to co-workers, clients and others, you will never see a church planted. I find even the most evangelistic team members can easily slip into the mentality of coming to work and doing their job. Nearly every opportunity I have with team members I am encouraging them to be bold in sharing their gift of salvation with others. Businesses that are among the people and yet hiding their light under a bushel are businesses, but not ‘tentmaking’ businesses. Every employee, of every business needs to know who their CEO is and what His job and role on the team and business is. We are overseas to witness - not to make a living. (Colossians 1:28-29)

3. Desire - Whatever the sport, whatever the business, whatever the ministry, all teams prepare, work hard and strive for victory. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) The reason a team is put together is to succeed or win. Yet some teams obviously don’t succeed. Why? In a word – desire. The team members simply don’t desire victory bad enough. Two key themes in life are memory and desire. Learn from memory, but desire should lead us. When the going gets tough desire keeps us focused, desire keeps us moving. For example, the Prodigal Son ‘remembers’ his father (memory), but it is his hunger, his desire, that drives him to go home. Discipline is not enough - we need desire. Art Turock says, “There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results." People, who desire more than anything else to win others to Christ, will.

4. Biblical Principles - Operate according to sound Biblical and business principles. The administrative staff of one of our company businesses consists of two people, one a Buddhist and one a Muslim. In hiring them we grilled them on integrity and honesty. We felt we had hired “good” people. However, several times within the first few days of operations they came to me with money saving ideas, which were unethical. These ideas would be normal operating procedures in most businesses. Thus I sat them both down and outlined who is the real CEO of our company – God. I clarified how everything we do must honor Him and that He is involved in every meeting we have and contract we do. At the time I was not sure of the wisdom of doing that, but in keeping with my belief that

God is our CEO I took the risk. I laid out a few basic principles like telling the truth, even if it means we will lose money; always doing our best whether it is a big or small client; and never cheating anyone, including the government. Not knowing how they would respond, I was pleased to see them both show respect and enthusiasm for serving a “kingdom company.” This has resulted in two benefits. One we have more open discussions about the Lord and His role in my life and work, and two, they help hold me accountable when I have a tendency to compromise. They are “watching” me.

There are many steps to starting businesses and operating businesses that also affect the tentmaker’s effectiveness in plant churches. However, if we do not have these three pillars in place: God, money, and people, we will not have the foundation to move forward. If you would like to discuss these issues further, please feel free to email me.