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Book Review: The Lego Principle: The Power of Connecting to God and One Another by Joey Bonifacio

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Bonifacio, Joey. *The Lego Principle: The Power of Connecting to God and One Another*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2012. 220 pp. \$14.99.

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The Lego Principle is about connection. Using the example of Legos, the children's toys, Joey Bonifacio explains the power of Christ followers connecting both to God and to other believers. Just as a Lego connects to other Legos above and below it, so, too, are we to connect to both God above and others around us. Bonifacio purposes that this connection to both God and others is the mark of true discipleship, resulting in genuine church growth. The idea of connection leading to discipleship and church growth is something that Bonifacio has seen firsthand. His church grew from 165 students in 1984 to over 72,000 members meeting in 15 church locations today in Metro Manila, Philippines.

Drawing on the experience of his own church's growth, Bonifacio demonstrates the importance of connecting to God and people through the three main sections of his book. The first section of the book defines and outlines what discipleship looks like from this perspective of connection. Joey maintains that discipleship is not about classes or events but about relationship. He shares, "Christians commonly say, 'Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship,' and yet all too often behave otherwise. Just like LEGO bricks, our life is about connecting to the top with God and connecting with others" (13). He shares that churches miss the mark of true discipleship by focusing on getting people into classes, events, and programs of the church, rather than into deep relationship with God and others.

Further, Bonifacio describes discipleship through relationship as the main priority of the church. He states that many churches fail to create disciples because they only make discipleship a part of what they do, rather than making it the sole focus. Bonifacio states, "As coffee is to 7-Eleven, so often is discipleship to churches. They take it on as part of their purpose and not *the* reason for their existence. I have found that churches tend to place discipleship on their shelves the way 7-Eleven has only an area in their stores for coffee" (23). For Bonifacio, discipleship and getting people connected into growing relationship is not just one thing that the church should be doing; rather, it should be its primary focus.

The second section of *The Lego Principle* covers how relationship with God and with people is built. Bonifacio believes there are four key building

blocks to relationship, which include trust, love, forgiveness and communication. These four are important because “trust is the foundation of relationships; love is the motive; and forgiveness is what resets, reboots, and restores them, communication is the process by which relationships thrive and grow” (104). He contends that all relationships look different, but these four building blocks are necessary whether we are talking about our relationships with our children, parents, spouse, friends, or God.

The final section of *The Lego Principle* concerns values. He shares, “You may be wondering why I’d want to dedicate an entire section of a book on discipleship to the subject of values. The answer is quite simple—because values are about the heart” (122). What we value shapes us as believers and as a church. Our values then, according to Bonifacio, should be God (chapter 9), people (chapter 10), Jesus (chapter 11), ministry (chapter 12), and every day (chapter 13). If we value these things, we will grow as followers of Christ; however, if we put other things such as “comfort and convenience, money and material things over our relationship with God and people, nothing much will change” (123).

The Lego Principle is an insightful and helpful book. Bonifacio’s aim throughout *The Lego Principle* is to show that discipleship through relationship “is God’s strategy for transforming the world,” and he accomplishes this goal (19). First, Bonifacio demonstrates the power of relationship on the individual person. Quoting Francis Frangipane, Bonifacio says, “While the doctrines of Christianity can be taught, Christlikeness can only be inspired” (10). To grow in holiness, we need more than knowledge of God; we need relationship with him and with others to sharpen us and point us to greater holiness. Classes and events are great for informing us, but relationship and example are needed as “man’s capacity to know what is right and wrong does not automatically translate to an ability to live rightly” (57). The challenge is that the church has become so class- and program-driven that many people are going through the motions doing church (i.e., classes, services, etc.), rather than being inspired toward Christlikeness. Churches would do well to listen and learn from Bonifacio’s warning here.

Bonifacio further explains that people’s lives will not change without this genuine connection by looking at the book of Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve. Bonifacio shares that a consequence of the fall was brokenness of relationship that led to “fear (‘I was afraid’), insecurity (‘because I was naked’), and cover-up (‘so I hid’)” (50). He rightly contends that fear, insecurity, and guilt are emotional issues that cannot be corrected simply with education. Bonifacio adequately demonstrates these consequences of the fall can only be overcome with the love, acceptance, and the relationship he discusses throughout the book.

Bonifacio explains that once we are reconnected with God and the issues of fear, insecurity, and shame are addressed, our lives should begin to radically transform. As we are connected to Christ in relationship, our

values and priorities should change. Bonifacio gives numerous examples, such as the example of money. Before a renewed relationship with Christ, most people would value money more than God. Once our relationship with God has been repaired, we see that Christ is supremely more valuable than money or anything else (178). Renewed connection with God radically changes a person's focus and priorities in life, which results in true discipleship and greater Christlikeness. Bonifacio again accomplished his goal and showed the power of connection in a person's life by looking at these changed values.

Connection with God results in individual transformation and discipleship, but that is not the only connection that *The Lego Principle* addresses. *The Lego Principle* also adequately shows the power of connecting with others and the impact it can have on a church, a community, and our world. The life-transforming power of Christ is not something that we are to keep to ourselves, but rather it is to be shared with others by entering their world and connecting with them. Bonifacio effectively demonstrates this by looking at the life of Christ:

In every recorded interaction that Jesus had with people, we see Him making disciples as He went on His way.... He attended weddings, visited with friends, played with children, and was present at funerals.... He talked about agriculture, construction, education, the environment... The Bible also says He slept, ate, prayed, worked and went to the synagogue. He lived out life in His body while building relationships and making disciples. He modeled the very idea of going and making disciples every day (182).

Bonifacio's main point is that discipleship through relationship "is God's strategy for transforming the world," and this happens through connecting with the world around us as Christ did (19). Discipleship and repaired relationship are not just for what is happening between us and God, but they should be shared with others as we engage in genuine relationship with our community. We are to use everyday life to interact with others and help them connect with God as we have. Bonifacio explains, "At the heart of this final discipleship principle is the phrase *as we go*: to work, to school, to play, to visit relatives, to the grocery, to the salon, to soccer matches, to church, to dine with friends, on a business trip.... In short, as we do 'life' in our 'body' every day, we go and make disciples" (183). Bonifacio effectively demonstrates that discipleship and church growth occur when we connect to those around us.

The Lego Principle is a terrific book that every pastor and every follower of Christ should read. Its implications have far-reaching effects on how we live our lives as individual believers and also on how we structure and teach at church. It is a poignant reminder of both Jesus' greatest command "to love God" and his second command "to love others" (Matthew 22:36-40). Bonifacio makes the point well that if we are going to change our world, it begins with connecting to God and then connecting with others.