

Bertram Lim

AFTER GOD'S OWN AGENDA

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Bertram Lim is Chairman of the Board of Center for Community Transformation. As of mid-2008, CCT has extended livelihood assistance to more than 120,000 members. These members also attend weekly Bible studies in fellowship groups that also function as support groups. These fellowship support groups almost totaling 5,000, further implements CCT's whollistic ministry of meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people. "CCT's vision is not just individual transformation. It is also community transformation. We hope to increase the number of committed Christians in the communities we are in to more than five percent, so that their communities will become Christ-centered."

Bertram Lim doesn't have a life verse. What he has is an agenda. In his life-long relationship with God and His Word, he has always strived to walk the narrow road even as he goes about his daily routine as a businessman, writes occasional bestsellers, and immerses himself in work among the urban poor. His agenda: to integrate his faith and life; to demonstrate what it means for him to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love others as much as he loves himself. (Mark 12:30-31)

Once a week in his office, even before work at every desk starts, all the office staff meets with him for a reading of the Bible. All managers, supervisors, and other employees have grown accustomed to this weekly "briefing" directly from "above." For Bertram Lim, this is a necessary part of sustaining the daily grind. "It's always part of what we do, this staff devotions."

Mr. Lim just had to pass on his biblical convictions since they drive his life and purpose. In the history of their company, compromising Christian beliefs hardly had its day. "My father founded this business and when he retired, my brother was in charge. My brother was CEO and I was sales manager. Business was good, until my brother and myself decided that we should not put out cigarette and liquor advertisements on billboards. Since God's Word says that our body is the temple of God then we don't have a right to destroy it.

"Because of that conviction, our business plunged from number four to a lower rank. But we stood our ground and eventually, by the grace of God, we regained our losses. We even

rose from number four, to three, two, and up to this time, among similar ventures, we've remained number one."

"It can be done." This sheer sharing of the Word at work, a sheer demonstration of how it is applied in business decisions, a sheer defiance of an apparent practice. "For example when we pay the right taxes, and our competitors don't pay their taxes, there seems to be unfair competition; but our Lord is gracious, and enables us to survive and to prosper.... We need to ask God for how He wants us to do our business. 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' We need to conduct business with integrity, and we need to ask God for business acumen."

But not only in business does he try to meet his agenda. In church, people come to him for counsel. He just naturally shares with them biblical answers to some of their life struggles. He has personally struggled with similar issues, so most of the time he speaks from a standpoint of having wrestled these issues with God himself. Most personal is the issue about complete submission to God.

Once when he was a proud student in Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he was so sure of himself. But in spite of his industry and "intelligence" he failed in most of his subjects. That made him fall on his knees before God. As he wrestled with Him in prayer, he learned a great deal about pride and conceit. So when people come to him asking about it, he could say very well that we cannot be in control; that however intelligent and self-sufficient we may think we are, we are after all, God's creation. We cannot think that we can do anything by our own might. We need to submit ourselves to God. After all our talents, gifts, riches, relationships, all these come from Him, and so, these need to be used for His glory.

In the course of his counseling, he realized that the same questions he wrestled with such as "*How to Manage your Money?*" "*How to make your house a home?*" "*How to Communicate with your Sons and Daughters?*" "*How to be a Good Steward of Your Time?*" and others are also asked by a great number of people. So to let them onto the wise counsel he gleaned from the Word of God, he compiled his advices. Since those questions were real needs, people were happy to even pay ten centavos for mimeographing to read Mr Lim's counsel. Later, these stapled mimeographed piles of wisdom called "*Practical Living Series*" were published into booklets. They sold like hotcakes. Today, they have been bound into book form, a testimony to how they have constantly served God's agenda.

Since he learned the discipline of Inductive Bible study while a young member of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, Mr Lim has also led many Bible studies. In his practical

stewardship of every naturally flowing insight, Mr Lim proceeds to meet the agenda of mentoring and making disciples. He diligently recorded his own struggles with the Word of God, sharing with his students the same questions he asked about and around it. After a while, his Bible study questions again became a series of books called “*Bible Study Guides*” and “*Practical Discipleship*.” In its organized format, the series echoes the Bible study process Mr Lim uses in his own teaching of the Bible.

Trying to meet the agenda of making disciples was never limited to church members and new Christians. Even in the micro-financing institution where he is Board Chairman, Mr Lim and his colleagues has made it a policy that everybody who is out to take a loan must attend Bible studies.

“Of course, at first, those people merely wanted to get the loan. But we’ve made it a policy that if they want to be a member or partner, they need to attend those weekly Bible studies. In the first two years of the institution, it seemed that this can’t be done. But we decided that that was the very essence of what we are as an institution, combining Bible study and micro lending. So, yes, it can be done.”

“Our field staff can’t be merely collectors. They are college graduates, trained account executives, and Bible study leaders. They follow a curriculum. They aren’t mere collectors because we want them to also act as shepherds. They must shepherd the people to meet not only their financial needs but also their spiritual hunger.”

“We don’t give the Bibles for free because we want our partners to value their Bibles. But we do provide a subsidy so that they can buy it at a much lower cost. Sometimes they resist even the idea of a Bible study, and if they don’t like it, they can always go to other micro-lending institutions.

“But those who remain with us sometimes attend them at first as a concession. After a few months, they eventually gain a new perspective about themselves. Since most of them are from the urban poor, some of them, for example, often feel that they are the scum of the earth, but after hearing and hearing the Word of God, they begin to understand that they are God’s children. This awareness then helps them regain their self-esteem. At first they come with all their dysfunctions, and then in the course of the Bible studies, they meet God and they have a desire to know Him more. Then they receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives. This changes their lives. What happens is a real transformation.”

Studies have shown that in a community, when at least five percent of the population has become committed Christians, the flavor of the community changes. There is less crime,

the place is cleaner, the children play more happily. For Mr Lim and his fellow board members at the Center for Community Transformation (CCT), this is actually the bigger agenda – to help people come to know God, towards a vision of changing lives; strengthening the family, and transforming not merely the individuals, but their communities as well.