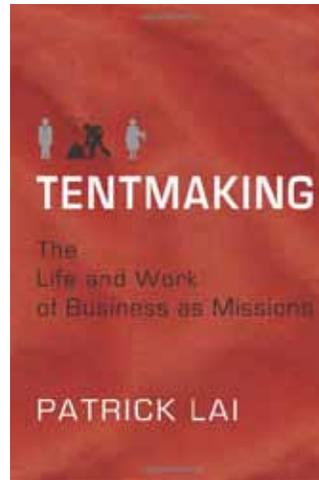


Book Summary



Tentmaking The Life and Work of Business as Missions

By: Patrick Lai

Short Summary

“The discrepancies between the secular and the sacred are often based on differing views of money. Money is a tool for accomplishing God’s purposes. The Lord asked Moses, ‘What is in your hand?’ Moses replied, ‘A staff’ (Exodus 4:2). The Lord then turns that staff into a snake. God works many miracles through that staff. The staff becomes a symbol of God’s power and comfort to Moses. God expects us to use what is in our hands for His glory. What is in your hand? Computer skills, an English degree, social work, or business experience? Let it be used by and for Jesus (ch. 17).” Tentmaking is a viable option for businessmen as a means to further the Gospel. Taking the tool of business into areas with restricted access to missionaries and where job creation is needed is an essential component to reaching the world for Christ.

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It's time to look outside the box of traditional missions. Although there is still a vital role for the traditional missionary method, there is also a need for new and innovative ideas for the Gospel to reach the difficult places. Tentmaking is one of those ideas. Because Truth says that God never changes and the world is changing at a rapid speed, we must be innovative in our strategies on how we share the Gospel. Tentmaking allows the nonbeliever to take a good look at Christianity as it plays out in everyday life. By bringing the Gospel through business to the unreached, we bring the Gospel to a place people already understand and need. One could term tentmaking as “*ministry outside the box AND business outside the box* (ch. 1).” After visiting and interviewing 450 people who are in the 10/40 window, Patrick Lai shares what he has learned. Realizing there are many challenges to enter a new culture and do business, *Tentmaking* is stuffed full of practical tips and suggestions to help the tentmaker succeed.

Tentmaking: What is it?

“Tentmaking provides many advantages, but the most important aspect of tentmaking is giving the lost a good look, and often a first look at Who Jesus really is. Tentmaking is using daily-life strategies to tell people about Jesus. The models and methods vary, but the goal is to glorify Jesus among the unreached (ch. 1).” Work and ministry are full integrated.

There are different ways to be a tentmaker to give the unreached a “good look.” Examine these 5 Types of tentmakers:

- T-1 – Christians employed cross-culturally who do not go motivated by evangelistic purposes
- T-2 – Christians who have a calling to a specific people, motivated by evangelism and are intentional to be prepared and seek training, self-supported
- T-3 – Christians whose income comes from home, and either own a business or only work part time, thus more flexible and have less stress on making money
- T-4 – Christians in an NGO or similar organization, in position to meet needs and can usually be more flexible
- T-5 – Christians who create a company to obtain a visa but not really doing business, income is through support (ch. 2)

People have different strengths and gifts. One type of tentmaker may be more suited to someone than another.

In looking at the life of the Apostle Paul, one will see an example of tentmaking for the spread of the Gospel. His work allowed him access to people and an understanding of their lives. He was able to live his relationship with Jesus as he worked. In turn, his investment in lives developed more tentmakers and his life and faith were reproduced many times over.

Paul showed those to whom he came in contact that he was who he said he was.

The author highlights 13 misconceptions and 20 advantages of tentmaking that help clarify the full scope of what it involves:

Tentmaking: What It Is Not

13 Misconceptions...Tentmakers:

- 1) are mavericks or lone rangers
- 2) do not wish to raise funds or have mixed motives
- 3) have little accountability
- 4) lack Bible training
- 5) do not learn the local language
- 6) have inadequate time for ministry
- 7) hold tentmaker jobs which last only two to three years
- 8) do not plant churches
- 9) are deceitful
- 10) are hindered in witnessing by their employers
- 11) have a conflict of priorities
- 12) lack prayer and financial support from home churches
- 13) are dreamers taking on too many responsibilities (ch. 3)

About the Book

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While there are definitely concerns to be addressed, most of the misconceptions are simply that...misconceptions. As tentmaking methods continue to improve and the weaknesses become strengths, a strong approach to reaching the unreached is created.

Tentmaking: Advantages

After dispelling the above misconceptions, the author presents 20 Advantages to tentmaking:

- 1) Access
- 2) Identity
- 3) Longevity
- 4) Credibility
- 5) Flexibility
- 6) Viable evangelism
- 7) Natural evangelism
- 8) Focused evangelism
- 9) Community evangelism
- 10) Creates jobs for nationals
- 11) Creates jobs for missionaries
- 12) Provides money for mission work
- 13) Vast resources to draw from
- 14) Vast resources to learn from
- 15) Modeling
- 16) Reproducible
- 17) Reduces dependency
- 18) Involves the laity
- 19) Blesses the Nation
- 20) Biblical (ch. 3)

A careful look at the advantages and misconceptions of tentmaking is helpful in solidifying the belief and conviction that tentmaking is a very viable option for reaching the unreached.

The Tentmaker

Character

There are 10 essential characteristics that need to be developed in a life in preparation for tentmaking:

- 1) Spiritually mature
- 2) Socially adept
- 3) Emotionally stable
- 4) Persevering
- 5) Evangelistic zeal
- 6) Recruit others
- 7) Language fluency
- 8) Team player
- 9) Clear objectives
- 10) Accountable (ch. 4)

The requirement is not perfection, but a level of maturity that enables the tentmaker to weather the challenges of tentmaking.

Preparation

A clear call to tentmaking and a confirmation that it is a viable option for reaching the unreached is non-negotiable. Having

experience in church life, evangelism, and business are the minimum of requirements. Being able to feed oneself spiritually without helps such as books and other resources is a must.

As a part of the preparation for a tentmaker, the author recommends being partially supported financially. There are quite a few advantages to this, not the least of which is the freedom it allows to begin to learn the language and get the business started.

In addition, entering a stronghold of the evil one demands the need for prayer warriors. “The kind of weapon we choose is not the key to success...All of our talents, all of God’s gifts, and all of our experiences and education must be sharpened to defeat the enemy. Nothing is unimportant. Every spiritual gift, acquired skill, and learned thought must be brought forward to the frontlines. No one can say ‘I have nothing to offer.’ The easy enemy positions have been captured; now the strongholds are left. We are to attack the enemy in season and out of season, in the hills and on the plains. To fight in such a war requires thorough preparation (ch. 4).”

The support base in a tentmaker’s home country is vital. “Tentmakers are at the forefront of the greatest spiritual battle. Military troops in the frontlines of a military campaign need up to eight times their number in supporting roles (ch. 10).” It’s important to build

a solid support base of prayer and finances before moving overseas in a tentmaking role.

Due to the importance of a tentmaker's home base, creative suggestions and practical tips are offered to aid in strengthening those relationships. The needs of a tentmaker are very unique, and it is highly recommended to build a network of caregivers who can respond to these needs.

If possible, a short-term internship experience before moving to the field will be invaluable. Spending between 10 weeks and 8 months experiencing and learning the world of business will give you a first hand look at the need of the unreached and how tentmaking is a viable tool. The short-term experience is a time to serve, use your gifts and skills and confirm your calling (ch. 6).

Entering the New Country

Two essential priorities in order to enter a culture are language and contextualization. It is recommended that a minimum of one year of language study is completed before entering the business realm. Speaking the language combined with a start to understanding the culture brings respect and honor to new relationships. "As a result, tentmakers need to move beyond being bi-cultural to becoming tri-cultural. A tri-cultural person understands truth from three perspectives. We need to understand the truth as given in the Bible. But we also need to

grasp how our own culture filters biblical truth, so we can discern what is of God and what is of our background. And finally, we need to know how the local culture cloaks truth, so we can reveal biblical truth in an understandable way to people we are serving. In learning the culture, we learn to comprehend the values, meaning and standards by which people are evaluating everything we do and say (ch.7)." For a clear presentation of the Gospel, there is no substitute to language and cultural acquisition. Both are absolutely essential to the work and the ministry. It's a continual process to learning language and culture, so settle into the role of a lifetime student.

"It is out of a deep, inner life with God that our ordinary lives are lived out. His presence empowers us to behave and respond in godly ways to worldly influences, temptations and problems. This inner response cannot be faked. Without a close, on-going relationship with Jesus, it is easy for our lives to become disjointed, losing their distinctiveness. We can become harassed and helpless like so many others. It is our inner response that ultimately wins respect and brings glory to God. We need to be aware of any tendency to pour out our lives for Christ without taking the time to refill our spiritual tanks (ch. 11)." Balancing time with the mountains of demands is a huge challenge. Set priorities. Be accountable to someone. Work on keeping the areas of your life in balance. Plan ahead. Delegate when possible. Be a learner

and ask for help. “We need to train ourselves to regularly lay out our priorities for the major areas of our lives and faithfully review them in prayer (ch. 11).”

“We get sidetracked into focusing on methods, approaches, theories, models, studies, manuals, etc., and lose sight of the fact that the one basic thing we desperately need more of is God – a passion for Him, seeking Him, knowing Him, being more full of Him, being changed more into the image of Jesus, walking more in the Spirit (Doug, ch. 12).”

One other aspect in respect to entering a culture is the importance of bonding, not only with the culture but also with your team. There are advantages to emphasizing one or the other when first entering a culture but both are important in the long run.

Wrestling with Some Aspects of Tentmaking

Since it predominately takes many interactions with Jesus to come to a knowledge of the Truth in closed access countries, tentmaking with its multiple daily and very natural moments with the same people is an ideal setting for evangelism. As our many roles in life interact with our faith, our lives tell the story and give opportunities for our voices to proclaim the words.

There have been 6 models of church planting that have been identified:

C-1 – Traditional Church Structure using the local trade or national language

C-2 – Traditional Church Structure using the heart language

C-3 – Contextualized Church Structure using the heart language and local ethnic arts and culture

C-4 – Contextualized congregation reflecting local language, local Muslim arts and culture, and the use of biblical acceptable/redeemable Islamic forms, vocabulary and traditions

C-5 – Congregations of Muslims who follow Christ yet remain legally and culturally Muslim

C-6 – Clusters of secret believers or individual believers within Islam (ch. 8)

How to model the new church so that it stands on biblical truth *and* is contextualized *and* it is sustainable is indeed a challenge. Studying these models along with studying the culture is a helpful way forward.

Developing leadership in the church involves not only imparting biblical Truth, but also recognizing and removing our own cultural bents. Local believers must be taught how to apply Scripture to their own culture and community. Qualities of a Godly leader include humility, honesty, passion, servanthood, sacrifice,

decisive, involved, entrepreneurial, and a promoter of fun (ch. Ch.9).

The role of a tentmaker in the national church or the international church is dependent on many factors and needs to be evaluated with careful thought before making a decision on how to be involved. There are many practical tips on how to best address the needs of national workers.

The topics of singleness, women and tentmaking, and caring for children while tentmaking are also addressed, along with a myriad of practical topics related to the life of a tentmaker.

There is a great tension in the identity of a tentmaker. To ease this tension and to live a life of integrity, it is important to be who you say you are. Business entrepreneurs should be business entrepreneurs and build the best business possible. A tentmaker as an employee in an already established company should be the best employee possible. A life led along biblical principles brings glory to God, and brings opportunities to share verbally the Truth.

“How we define ourselves is a key question. As tentmakers, though we may teach or operate a business, and are teachers or business persons, that should just be one part of ‘how’ we are. Jesus must be incorporated into who we are and what we do and say. Consider: do peripheral things define us? Is our identity wrapped up in our family, our job, our titles, or

our wealth? Or do we define ourselves through our relationship with Jesus (ch. 8)?”

“If we are to reconcile everything to Christ (Colossians 1:20), then whatever job we have IS ministry.” This is the truth that each Christian should grab and apply to life, regardless of how one’s days are spent. If considering the life of a tentmaker, remember this:

“As you prepare, listen to His guidance for you and remember that when we meet Jesus face to face, He is not going to ask about our preparation, our job title, how many people we employed, or the number of people we led to Him. He will simply ask, ‘Did you obey?’ (I John 3:23-24) (ch. 4)”

About the Author

Patrick Lai and his family have lived and worked in the 10/40 Window for twenty-three years. They served for four years as regular missionaries and nineteen years as tentmakers. The Lord has enabled Lai’s team to plant two churches and begin several for profit businesses. Lai has degrees in Business, a Master of Divinity and a Doctorate of Intercultural Studies. He has written numerous articles on tentmaking and lectures around the world on using business as missions for Christ.