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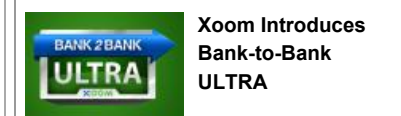
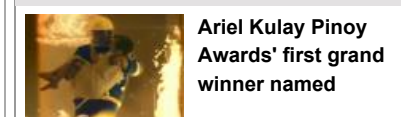
Q&A: 'Lego Principle' author Joey Bonifacio

By Karen Flores, ABS-CBNnews.com
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MANILA, Philippines – Here is a book on discipleship that even non-believers of God can relate to.

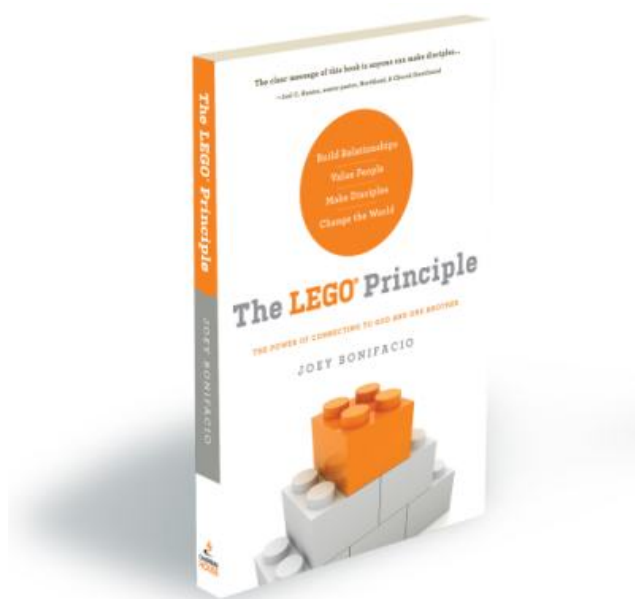
Instead of using a religious approach, businessman-turned-pastor Joey Bonifacio treaded a more inclusive path in his newest book titled "The Lego Principle" – the path of relationships.

Inspired by the iconic Lego bricks, the book revolves around the simple idea that each person is designed to connect to the top (God) and to the bottom (other people).



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"It's very relatable in the sense that when you read it, you realize it's a relationship and not a religion," Bonifacio said of his newest book. "I think that when it becomes a religion, it becomes very prescriptive, that 'this is the way it should be.'"

"I have friends who don't believe in God," he added. "I don't think that's a problem because at the end of the day, the book couches itself in terms of a journey. The words 'friendship,' 'relationship,' 'discipleship,' is what the book is all about."

In the book, Bonifacio asserts that a person, regardless of religion (or lack of it), skin color, race and gender is made to "connect" with other people, whether in the form of a friendship, a marriage or a business or career partnership.

"If I took away all your relationships on earth, not even the sunset makes sense. If you look at the most beautiful scenes you've seen in the world, it doesn't make sense if you're the only one who saw it. If you haven't shared it with anybody, there's no point. At the end of the day, it's about connections. And the only real way you can have good connections is when you're first connected to God," he explained.

But there are "obstacles" to making this connection, he said. "Because in and by yourself, you're selfish. By yourself, you are incapable of love, you're self-centered, you're arrogant, you're insecure. That's the reality of mankind, we are like that."

So how can this be fixed? "The only way that you're going to fix this is when you know that God loves you. The person that's most valuable in the world willingly gave his son for you. The basis of that eternal truth that people believe is ancient is still relevant. Without that value at the core of your heart, you won't connect to others well. You're still going to be insecure. You're still going to want to prove yourself. You're still going to be selfish. You're still going to be arrogant. Because the beginning point is connecting on top, with God – that ability to connect to God allows you to connect to others," he said.

What about non-Catholics and those who insist that there is no God? "Kasi sometimes when there are only spiels of religion, they're being smothered by it. Or maybe because of a lot of the hypocrisy as well, na parang you say one thing and then you do another. I can't blame them, that they have a wounded relationship. But that's not God. That's people, God didn't do that. It may just take a longer time for them to see na 'oo nga, 'di naman pala ganoon 'yun.'

"Remember, for one to be loved, there has to be freedom. God gives us the freedom to reject him. And freedom also has its cross because you're free to sin. You can create havoc over issues in life and blame God."

The first chapter of "The Lego Principle" starts with the story of the founder of Lego, and proceeds with Bonifacio's own experience and a dash of Bible verses.

"Each chapter ends with a Lego story. And I point that that it doesn't matter what year the Lego was made because it will connect even to a younger person," he said.

After Uniqlo and Cotton On, which of these foreign brands would you like to come to the Philippines?

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But he was quick to add: "I allude to him (founder of Lego) but I make the point that the Lego Principle is not because of him. It's because of the Lego's ability to connect to the top and to the bottom."

Here are the rest of Bonifacio's thoughts about his newest book, the Catholic Church and today's youth, as shared with ABS-CBNnews.com:

What can readers expect from "The Lego Principle"?

That's a good question, because I didn't purposely make it a "how to" book. It's a description and not a prescription. It's a description of what it should look like. Probably the next book is going to be the "how to." But this one is more on "what does it really look like?" It makes you want it.

Because at the end of the day, desire is a more powerful agent. When you desire something, you figure it out with you. But if you didn't like it, even if I tell you how to do it, wala pa ring saysay.

Is it safe to say that this is an inspirational book?

I wouldn't say "inspire" because there are things here that are truths, that do have application. But it's couched in a story format, in a way that it's all... heavy on the Bible.

So it tries to make the Bible more relevant?

It gives the Bible relevance na parang "wow, I never realized what that verse was about." Parang all of a sudden, the book makes it come alive.

If you look at "Beauty and the Beast," "Shrek," "Titanic," even "Notting Hill" and Bella and Edward [of the "Twilight" series], it's the same thing. But why is it resonating so much to us? Kasi we're all looking for that: extreme, radical, passionate love where you're willing to trash all of the convenience, all of the security for someone who's not worth it, supposedly. That's the Gospel. But the problem with us is that we keep thinking that a Bella and an Edward will do it but in real life, they're cheating on each other. Kasi hindi natin kaya eh. The only one who can really do that for us is God.

Think about the theme of the dragon and the knight in shining armor rescuing the girl. That's Adam and Eve. That didn't happen, Adam didn't kill the dragon and that's why we're a mess.

These themes are not accidents. These are universal themes because that's the way it really was. Kaya lang we keep twisting the themes to make us the center rather than God being the center. So the more that we try to make ourselves the center, the more the story doesn't work. Kasi we've got the story inverted. Mali 'yung pagkakaintindi natin sa storya because it begins with Him. He's the center of all of this.

Think of it like this: we have a shih tzu. I love my dog. But sabi ko kahit gaano ko kamahal ito, I wouldn't become a dog. I wouldn't allow myself to become a dog so he would learn more about me.

And yet God did that. I wouldn't allow myself to be leashed. Why would you allow yourself to be crucified? Why would you allow yourself to eat the slop that he eats? You won't. You're incapable of that kind of love, basically. And the only way that you can learn that kind of love is to first experience it through God. If you experience that from him on a daily basis, you're able to gradually give that to others. That's the point of the book, na doon ka lang makaka-connect.

The more you try to make that connection, it just doesn't work. But the more I come to him and receive his love, receive his forgiveness, the more I understand, the more I'm able to do it. Nagiging forgiving ako kasi alam ko pinatawad lang ako eh.

What about those who do not believe in God? Can they still relate to this book?

It's very relatable in the sense that when you read it, you realize it's a relationship and not a religion. I think that when it becomes a religion, it becomes very prescriptive, that "this is the way it should be."

Your relationship with God, my relationship with God is unique. Kids today would rather read a picture Bible. What's wrong with that? Now I have to learn Keynote to preach. I don't use a Bible. When I go to church I use screens because everybody use screens, mao-out of place ako.

The point is, it's a different way of connecting. Just because it's different doesn't mean mali, 'di ba? But the universal, 'yung trust, hindi pwedeng mawala 'yun. Kasi walang

relationship – whether with a spouse, whether with God or with your boss – there has to be trust. That's the foundation. Love is the motivation for a relationship. Forgiveness is also needed kasi nagkakamali ka kahit anong gawin natin, kaya kailangang magpatawaran. And then communication – to speak, to act, to listen. These are universal.

How you go about it, iba-iba 'yan. But at the end of the day, is there trust? Is there truth? Is there a level of reliability, of integrity? 'Yan 'yung basic. 'Yang mga 'yan, mare-relate 'yan ng somebody who doesn't believe in God. Hindi pwedeng wala 'yan.

Why do you think some people abandon their religion?

Sometimes kasi, the way it is presented is "you're gonna go to hell." It's fear. Why? 'Di ba parang you're offering the negative side of the product? You're not presenting the best side of the product, that the God of all creation made everything so valuable. He so values us that he gave us the most valuable to him. And because of that, nagco-connect ka. Then you grow and learn from that.

You can share this truth to anybody. This is not a complicated story. That's the beauty of it – it's so simple that anyone can understand. But we turned it into a religion, into a system, into an institution which it was never made to be. It was meant to be the truth.



I'm not saying churches are bad. But the role of the church is to keep reintroducing that simple message. That if you connect, you can shape things. People can do that.

What was your life like before you became a pastor?

When I was a teenager, I was wild. That was in the 70s. I was very rebellious. I was a man of the world.

What made you shift gears?

When I got married, when I had a child, I realized I was self-destructing. I mean, it's just a matter of time I'm not going to treat this woman or this child right. (Bonifacio is married to his wife Marie for 30 years. They have three sons -- Joseph, David and Joshua -- and a dog)

And my other grandmother kasi was a Christian. The last story in the book talks about my grandmother who was very devout, very religious.

What's your next step after "The Lego Principle"? Is there another book in the works?

Maybe at some point, I'd like to write about the Lego culture, which is more of a how-to.

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