

### 3 Connection Essentials

By Pastor Ryan Huguley

There is no shortage of reasons people leave one church to attend another:

“My last church wasn’t Biblically faithful.” “My last church didn’t offer the programs I wanted for my kids.” “My last church had unqualified people in leadership.” “My last church had cutting edge worship strait out of the 1500s.” “My last church was amazing, but my job moved me away.”

Obviously, some of the reasons a person leaves one church to attend another are good reasons and others of them are selfish, consumer-driven, and disobedient. Sometimes people leave churches because of their own sin and often times people leave churches because of the unrepentant sin dwelling within the leadership of the church itself. Yet, of all the reasons I have heard over the last twelve years of ministry, one stands out as the most painful, *“I really loved the church, I just couldn’t get connected.”*

This is TERRIBLE! No one should ever be able to leave your church saying it was simply impossible to get connected. Yet, in far too many cases this vital system has not been sufficiently thought through, or has been ignored altogether. If this is the case do not miss what is really at stake. What we sacrifice when we ignore a means by which to help new people get connected to the life of our church is discipleship. So, here’s my big idea in all this:

#### BIG IDEA

“You can’t disciple those you don’t connect.”

Many pastors assume people will get connected if they want to. The problem is, assumption is the enemy of engagement. It is not the responsibility of a new person to provide the mechanism by which they can get connected. This is the churches’ responsibility.

You cannot disciple those you do not connect, so how can we carefully provide clear next steps for new people and what are the essential elements that comprise an effective connection process? I believe there are three - a destination, a vehicle, and a mechanic.

#### A DESTINATION

No one ever sets out on a journey without first determining their desired destination. Therefore, the planning of every trip starts with a basic question: “Where do we want to go?” A similar question is necessary in the planning of an effective connection strategy for your church:

#### CONNECTION QUESTION

What *exactly* does “connected” look like at my church?

The answer will differ from church to church based on your discipleship strategy, but until you answer this question you cannot form a strategy around it.

At Redemption, we define “connected” as a covenant member participating in the three essential rhythms of discipleship - worship, community, and mission. We have included these three rhythms in our missional statement and proclaim that we are a church worshipping Jesus in community on mission to make him known. This means we want people to have completed our membership class, attend the worship gathering each Sunday, participate in a community group, and serve on a missional team. Until all of this is happening we believe we still have work to do in insuring our people are connected.

What are the essential rhythms you believe people need to be connected to? What programs do you believe people need to be participating in? What are your desired expectations for those who call your church home? The the more clearly you answer these questions, the more clearly you will understand what your are trying to connect people to. You can’t disciple those you don’t connect and the first connection essential is A Destination.

#### A VEHICLE

Once you have determined where you are trying to go, you are ready to design the vehicle by which you will help people get to this desired destination.

#### CONNECTION QUESTION

What are the necessary next steps?

Let’s say like us, you determine that covenant members worshipping in community on mission is your connection destination. What is it going to take to get people there? Few people walk in ready on day one prepared to jump in to all of that and even if they do, they do not know how to get plugged in.

People need next steps. How will you move people through a series of subsequent next steps leading to connection?

The best first step is getting people's information. At Redemption we use a simple information card where people write their name, address, phone number, email, provide prayer requests, etc. Each week during our platform announcements we have *everyone* (yes, EVERYONE) fill out this card. We say, "If you're new we need you fill out the entire card and if you've already filled one out we just need your name, and anything we can pray with you about." The number of people who fill out the card when *everyone* does it is exponentially higher. We always tell people the reason it is so important everyone fills out the info card is that it is the only means by which we can follow up and help people get connected.

Once you have people's information you have to provide them with their next step. It may be a newcomer class, a small group, a lunch, or a serving opportunity. Everyone's first step at Redemption is our monthly Newcomer's Lunch where, over a meal we provide, I share a quick overview of our vision, strategy, and have a brief time of Q&A. After someone has attended the Newcomer Lunch we invite them to the Intro to Redemption Class where we cover our story, strategy, theology, and what it means to be a covenant member. From this class we begin our membership process and we are well on our way to our connection destination.

This is hard work, but necessary work. Your strategy will most likely be complex, but your next steps must be simple. You can't disciple those you don't connect, so once you have your connection destination, what are the necessary next steps to get there? This is your connection vehicle.

### **A MECHANIC**

It does not matter how nice of a vehicle you drive, at some point it requires a mechanic to keep it running. The same is true of your connection vehicle. No matter how clear the next steps and how fine tuned the system, someone has to keep it running.

### **CONNECTION QUESTION**

Who is going to keep the connection vehicle running?

At Redemption we believe every member has a part to play in this process. Everyone should be involved in helping new people take their next steps. If someone serves on a team with you, or in your community and has not attended the Newcomer Lunch, or Intro to Redemption class, we encourage our members to encourage them to take that step.

More specifically it requires a small team capable of keeping the vehicle running. They follow up with new people, hand write cards, update spread sheets, send emails, and keep everyone moving in the right direction. This is some of the most thankless and monotonous discipleship. Don't forget and do not let your team forget that this work, though often unseen, is nonetheless, discipleship because we can't disciple those we don't connect.

So, who can keep your connection vehicle running? Who cares about the stories represented on a spreadsheet? Who is passionate about details and desires to give the attention and time necessary for this essential work?

We can't disciple those we don't connect. Connection requires a destination, a vehicle, and a mechanic. No more excuses. No more making it new people's responsibility. Let's get them connected so we can get them disciplined. This is the mission we have been called to and this mission requires and engagement that only grows from genuine connection.

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