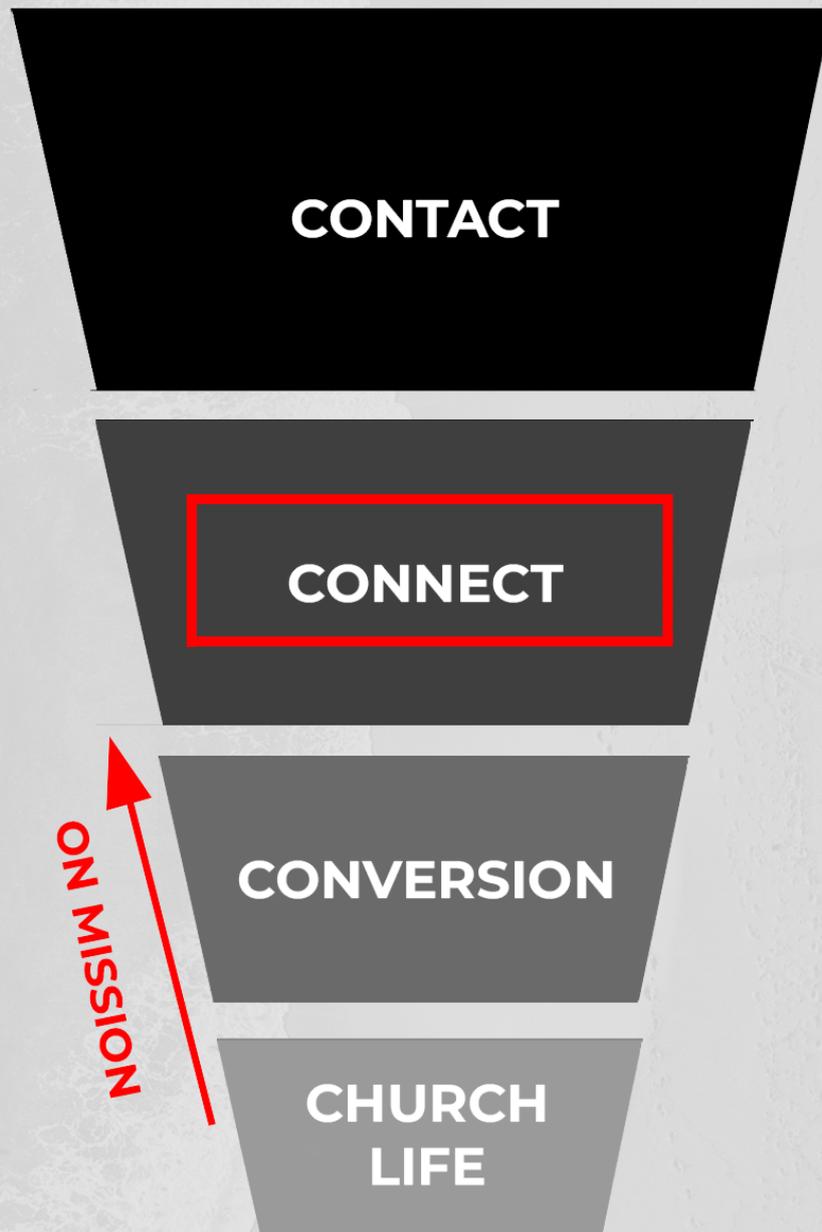




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MAKING CONNECTIONS



Looking at the mission funnel, let's think about helping people make the journey from being contacts at church to being connected to Christians and Christianity.

Let's start with the job of Connection. Our launch team has unchurched contacts. Hundreds of them. Family, friends, and neighbours. If Gospel convictions are deeply embedded in our church community, they will have an urgency to share the Gospel with them. This doesn't make it easier, but it does provide the right starting motivation for both prayer and action. Our role then is to provide context and moments where people at church can help their contacts explore Jesus.

This doesn't replace the need for us to equip every person in the church to share the Gospel. As a church, and as shepherds of the church, we want to continually, and in many ways, be helping those we lead give an answer for the hope they have. However, the reality is that most people don't have the gifts, skills or confidence to take someone from "hey to saved". That is, from not knowing anything about Jesus, to having life in him. It's for this reason that God gives us the church, His body, with its different gifts. Our role is to use the varied gifts in the body to provide moments for relationships to form, and conversations to be had, that lead to people exploring Jesus. **For the purposes of this discussion, we'll call these Connecting Events.**

Connecting events are becoming more important as people become distant from Christianity, have little understanding of the Gospel, a skewed view of Jesus, and a negative view of the church. This growing part of our culture needs to see and experience Gospel community in a safe way, before they're willing to engage in deeper questions.

This means we need a longer "ramp" for people. People are more wary, and further back in their understanding of the Gospel. Rather than expecting them to meet us where we are, we must create spaces where they can see the Gospel at work in community, so that they are willing to take the next step. These events are often the first thing that our unchurched friend will come to. It's the pointy end of mission.

These events don't need to be extravagant, or drain our resources. They should be high quality and engaging, but also simple.



Instead of thinking bigger and better, we need to establish plausibility structures for non-Christian friends. That often happens just by exposing people to Christian community. We want to give people a good taste of Christians and Christianity, because many have had their perception skewed by the media. Connecting events give a great chance to rectify that. They are the hook to create interest, to bridge the gap between the big questions everyone is asking, and plausible answers that have real life impact. We want every connecting event to be driving towards those things, but they don't need to be a huge song and dance.

However, in isolation connection events have limited impact. They're part of a pathway. They're one step for people. And without a pathway we feel the pressure to want every outcome from every event, which could lead to altar calls at dinner parties. We can't rush people. Our pathway helps them make the next small step.

So here are three questions we must consider:

First, "Who is this for?" The answer to this question is shaped around who we're trying to reach. The answer to this question helps us shape the look, feel and vibe of the event.

Second, "What's the purpose of this event?" What role does this play in people taking a step towards exploring Jesus?

Third, "What resources and capacity do we have?" We want to set up things that are achievable for our plant, that we can run well, and that people want to invite their friends and family to. It doesn't have to be extravagant. Simple is often better. Be realistic, be creative, look for the hidden talents in our launch team, and build around them.





Let's finish with some of the challenges and dangers of connection events.

The first is gaining and losing trust. The first few events might struggle to get guests. We must not be surprised or upset. We're asking our people to risk their relationships, and to entrust their loved ones to us. So don't be discouraged - just make the events stellar. Our aim should be that our people leave every event saying 'that was awesome. It would have been perfect for my dad/ sister/ neighbour/ friend. Once that's happened a few consecutive times, they might be willing to trust us with those they know and love. While it might take 2-3 great events to gain trust, just one bad event that is awkward and uncomfortable, or misses the mark, loses trust. When trust is lost, it can take years for someone to risk their relational credit on our events again.

The second danger is the bait & switch. That is, talking about an event as a fun activity, and then slipping in a hard hitting Gospel message. While it's tempting to not 'miss such a great opportunity', if we do we might never get that opportunity again. It loses the trust of our people, and often those invited will leave feeling deceived.

The third danger is saying 'it's good for building community too'. It is tempting to announce that 'even if you don't bring a friend this will be great for you to get along to!' While that might be true, it communicates an "out". We give our people an excuse to not invite, to just come along. The event might look good with 100 people there. But if only 5 of them are unchurched, it's not achieving the outcome we're running it for.



Finally, the big danger is that these events can't stand alone.

They don't work in isolation, without good, relational structures and processes to follow-up. There needs to be concrete next steps. These next steps need to be known not only by those invited to the event, but (perhaps more importantly) to those who invited them. Our people are the ones having follow-up conversations, checking-in on how they found it, so if by God's grace they want to explore more, our people must have a clear picture of how to do that.

Connection events don't have to be complicated and resource intense. They do need to be thoughtful and deliberate. They must work with everything else our church is doing, so our people have confidence in what's happening, and those that come have clear steps if they want to explore Jesus more.



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