

**The Simple Church Presentation**  
**NWIBA Pastors Roundtable**  
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**Background:** The Simple Church process really came to the forefront in thinking about how we do church from a book entitled: **Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples**. Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006. Thom Rainer is the president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, and Eric Geiger is the executive pastor of Christ Fellowship in Miami, Florida. Basically this book shares a clear message from case studies of four hundred American churches: Church is done best when it's kept simple. They discovered that the healthiest churches in America tend to have a simple process of making disciples. They found that in general, that simple churches are growing and vibrant and that conversely, complex churches are struggling and anemic. They say:

*"We compared growing and vibrant churches to non-growing and struggling churches. Church leaders from both groups were asked to complete the same survey which was designed to measure how simple their church discipleship process was. We anticipated that there would be a relationship between a simple process and church vitality, but the results were greater than we imagined. Our statistical consultant told us that we had found something big."*

*"The vibrant churches were much more simple than the comparison churches. The difference was so big that the probability of the results occurring with one church by chance is less than one in a thousand."*

**I. Summarization of Main Points**

- **Simple Church is not really another church model; it is not another program to implement – it will help you implement the model you have chosen (Traditional, contemporary, attractional, missional)**
- **Simple church is all about process- it is about designing a simple process of discipleship in the church. It is a concept that helps churches focus on disciple making that aligns with activities. In fact, it will help you implement the model you have chosen and hopefully help you simplify.**
- **Def: *A simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.***
- **Simple Church leaders are designers. They design opportunities for spiritual growth. Whereas complex church leaders are programmers. They run ministry programs.**

- A designer is focused on the end result – the overall picture. They attempt to design an environment where life change is likely to occur.
- The Simple Church emphasizes the need for church leaders to design a process that intersects people with God’s grace – that is, they must craft opportunities where people will encounter the grace of God.
- *"Imagine a church where you, as a leader, can articulate clearly how someone moves from being a new Christian to become a mature follower of Christ. Imagine that your church is no longer just busy but is alive with ministries and activities that make a difference. Such is the simple church revolution."*
- Basically, the Simple Church process is guided by four aspects that really is the thrust of the book and process – clarity, movement, alignment, and focus.
- **Clarity** – *the process must be communicated and understood by the people* – **simplicity** – *It’s the master blueprint about how you are going to build disciples.*
- **To get clarity you need:**
  1. **Define** – *You must be able to define your process of bringing people toward spiritual maturity. (describe what kind of disciple you wish to produce and then use it (the purpose) as your process, e.g., Connecting to God, Growing in Christ-likeness, Serving in Joy, Going to Evangelize)*
  2. **Illustrate** – *You must be able to illustrate your process in a way that your people can see it. A visual illustration of your process will enable your people know where they are in the process. (ILLU: Race track)*
  3. **Measure** – *You must be able to measure the process- must be able to measure if people are progressing through the process. (measure horizontally, not vertically –e.g., percentage of people who moved from worship to small groups to ministry teams to evangelism)*
  4. **Discuss** – *There must be consistent discussion of the process so that it will be woven into the identity of the church.*
  5. **Increase Understanding** – *Do this by articulating the process corporately, share the process interpersonally (dialogue with others about it), live the process personally.*
- **Movement** – *It is the sequential steps in the process that causes people to move to greater levels of commitment. Movement is about flow. It is about assimilation. Movement is what causes a person to go to the next step. (ILLU: relay race and handing off the baton – movement is the handing off of the baton) Movement is what happens between the programs. Movement is how someone is handed off from one level of commitment to a greater level of commitment. E.g., How a church moves someone from worship service to small group is movement.*
  - *Order the sequence of your programs to reflect your process. Connect (worship services) Grow (small groups) serve (ministry teams) Go (missional involvement)*
  - *Create Short-term Steps* – How can you create steps to move

people from one program in your process to another. (Connect 101 helps people move from visitor to member etc.)(Opportunities to Serve to move people from small groups to service)

- *Capitalize on Relationships* – Relationships bridge the gap between programs in your process- use relationships as means of handing people off from one program to the next.
  
- ***Alignment*** – *Is the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same process. i.e. implement the same process everywhere, unite leaders around the process, ensure that existing and new ministries fit the process.* Alignment ensures that the entire church body is moving in the same direction, and in the same manner. All ministries are operating from the same ministry blueprint.
  - *Recruit on the Process* – Recruit and hire staff based upon their commitment to the ministry process – there must be theological and philosophical alignment.
  - *Accountability - You* must hold staff and others accountable to implement the ministry process. Without accountability, people will naturally drift away from the ministry process.
  - *Implement the same process everywhere* – That is, each ministry department is guided by the same process as the whole church, e.g., children’s ministry, youth ministry, adult ministry all have the same simple process.
  
- ***Focus*** – *The commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process. Focus most often means saying “no.” Focus requires saying, “yes” to the best and “no” to everything else. This is the most difficult simple church element to implement. Focus keeps your simple discipleship process simple and keeps it from becoming cluttered.*
  - *Eliminate* – Eliminate programs that are outside of the ministry process.
  - *Limit Adding* – Be careful not to add programs to the ministry process – it will lengthen the ministry process and that will mean that fewer people will be able to move through it. Try to meet new needs that develop through your existing program instead of starting new programs. Less programs mean more focus on existing programs; means more excellence; means more impact. Add new options, not new programs, e.g. additional worship service is a new option, not a new program.
  - *Reduce Special Events* – Simple churches are so focused on their ministry process that there is little time for extra events – special events would distract. Funnel the event into an existing program, e.g., 2-day marriage seminar – funnel into through your small group ministry.

- *Combine the Special Event with an Existing Program* – For example Christmas service- instead of having a separate Christmas program in addition to a regular weekend service- offer it during your normal Sunday AM service format.

## **II. Benefits of the Simple Church Process**

- ***The Overall Refutation of the Program driven and full menu church***
  - The reality is that many churches, many pastors, many church members are busy with church stuff that really had no strategic purpose in moving people to deeper levels of discipleship.
  - The simplicity in the ministry process in the Simple Church philosophy fits well with the cry of our culture. The complexity in our current ministry structures actually pack full the schedule of the minister and member alike.
- ***Church Leaders as Designers of a Process of Discipleship***
  - Often, as ministry leaders, we can't see the big picture of moving people to spiritual maturity, because we are putting our energy into running programs
  - But the emphasis should be on the church leader as a designer of a ministry process that leads people to spiritual maturity – they see the overall picture.
  - The emphasis is to work on your church, not simply work in your church.
- ***The Emphasis on a Discipleship Process***
  - I was drawn to the idea of a sequential process of moving members to deeper levels of discipleship.
  - It allows you to have a blue print to plan and build your ministry around – it helps you streamline your ministry etc.
  - Helps you to see numbers across the church process horizontally so you can observe not just growth, but sequential movement.
- ***The Emphasis on Philosophical as well as Theological Alignment of Staff***
  - It is not enough to believe the same things, but also to have agreement on how and what to do in accomplishing the things we believe.
  - If a staff team is going in many different directions within the team, unity and teamwork becomes problematic.
- ***The Four Elements of the Simple Process – clarity, movement, alignment, and focus***
  - These four elements help you define, manage, and measure the process.

### **III. Cautions with the Simple Church Process**

- ***A Potential for Process Idolatry***
  - We can have the mistaken idea that running people through a process will make them disciples- or more mature.
  - If the content of the programs in the process is lacking, then the church can be running through a process that is not accomplishing much of any real substance.
  - Systems can become ends in themselves – we cannot assume that people’s affections are being directed toward God.
  - Maybe there needs to be more emphasis on theological vision within the ministry process.
  
- ***A Concrete Connection of Church Vitality to a Simple Process Without the Mention of Critical Factors leading to Spiritual Vitality like the Power of the Spirit, Doctrinal Fidelity, Prayer etc.***
- ***Practically Very Difficult to Implement in an Established Church***
  - Competing values and visions, coupled with church authority shared by multiple leaders, makes it difficult to streamline and reduce programming in the way Rainer and Geiger advocate.
  
- ***Vibrant Churches Seemed to be Measured only in Terms of Numerical Growth*** – You can be large and not healthy
- ***Spiritual Growth is much more complicated than moving people through a Sequential process***
  - Life is messy. People have messed up lives, struggle with dark things, and spiritual maturity comes in many ways outside of Church programs, regardless of how focused and simple those programs may be.
  - Most spiritual growth comes outside of assigned Church functions and programs.
  - Again, the Simple Church process can lead to the mistaken idea that completing the steps in the process leads to spiritual growth.