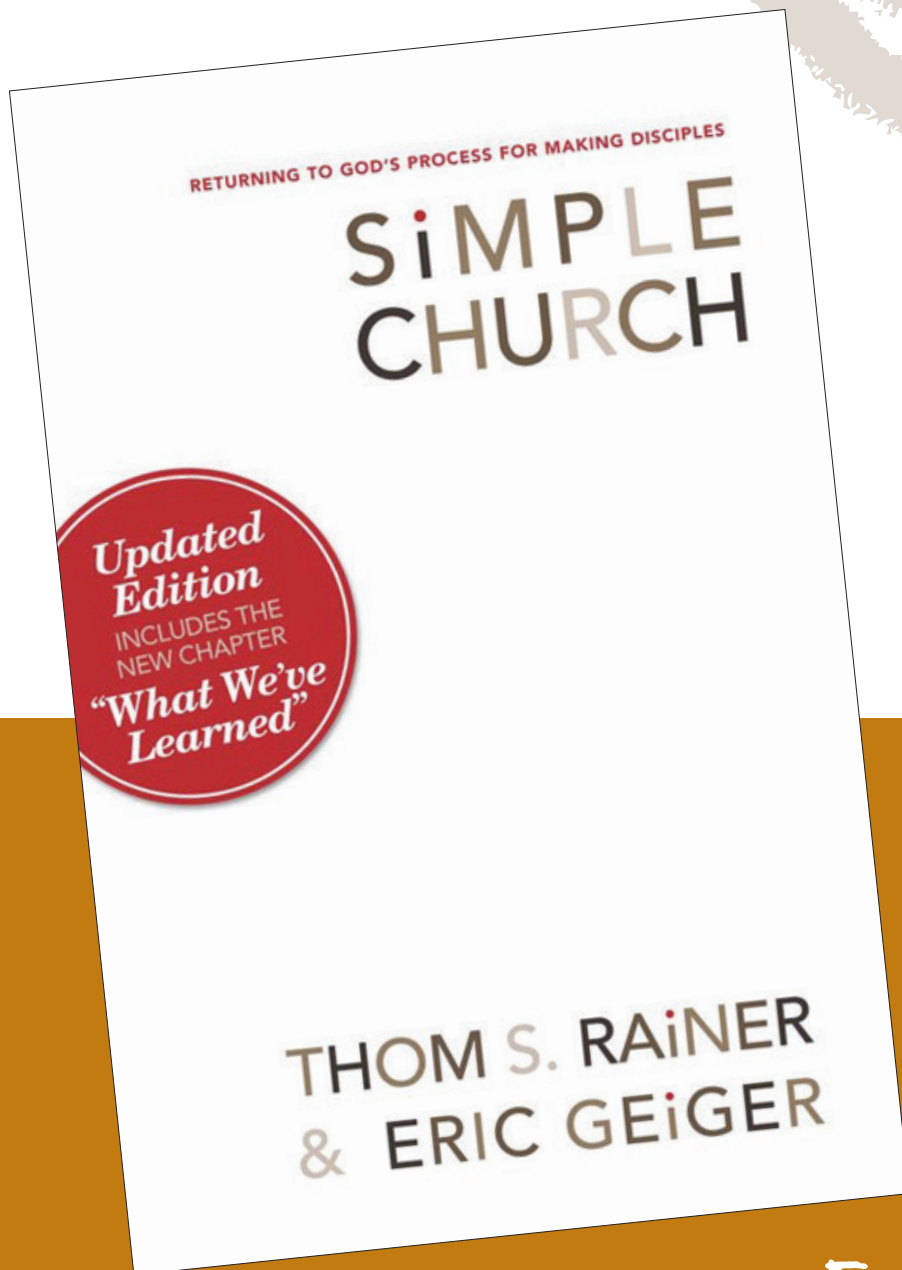


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# sums



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**Simple Church** | *Thom Rainer, Eric Geiger*

Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples  
B&H Publishing Group: Nashville, TN, 2011. 296 pages.

*Many of our churches have become cluttered – so cluttered that people have a difficult time encountering the simple and powerful message of Christ. So cluttered that many people are busy doing church instead of being the church.*

**It's time for church leaders to simplify.**

Thom Rainer, President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, and Eric Geiger, Vice President of the Church Resource Division at LifeWay (Eric was Executive Pastor at Christ Fellowship in Miami when *Simple Church* was written) conducted extensive research of over four hundred evangelical churches and discovered a simple revolution.

Their research discovered that, in general, simple churches are growing and vibrant. Churches with a simple process for reaching and maturing people are expanding the kingdom. Church leaders who have designed a simple biblical process to make disciples are effectively advancing the movement of the gospel. Simple churches are making a big impact.

**Rainer and Geiger developed a definition for a simple church:**

***A simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.***

Their research also revealed four elements that were critical to designing a simple ministry process. **Clarity, Movement, Alignment, and Focus** are necessary in a simple church design. The four elements are also related to one another – it is hard to have one without the others.

**Based on their findings, Rainer and Geiger expanded their definition of a simple church as follows:**

***A simple church is designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. The leadership and the church are clear about the process (clarity) and are committed to executing it. The process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus).***

## Simple Church | *Thom Rainer, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

*As you consider the design or redesign of your ministry, these four elements should be at the top of your list.*

### 1

#### Clarity

**Clarity is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people.** A clear process has the ability to be easily communicated and understood. Clarity involves certainty, and it eliminates confusion. For a church to be simple, the process must have a high degree of certainty.

***Clarity and simplicity go hand in hand. They are close friends.***

A process that has clarity is clearly defined so that the leadership and the people know exactly how the church is structured to move people toward spiritual growth. The how is clear. The process is discussed, taught, and illustrated.

Some churches are not clear on a ministry process because they do not have one. Others have one, but it is too complex. It is too complicated, too long, or too confusing. The process is ineffective because it cannot be understood. Without understanding, commitment wanes.

***Understanding always precedes commitment.***

If people are to embrace and participate in the ministry process, they must be able to internalize it. To internalize the process, they must first grasp it. Clarity is thus absolutely essential.

This process must first be clear to the leaders in a church before it can be clear to the people in the church. Breakdowns most often occur when church leaders stumble through an explanation of a ministry process.

***Instead of clarity, there is often stuttering.***

If leaders are not clear, the people will not grasp the ministry process. If leaders have a difficult time discussing and teaching the ministry process, it lacks clarity. And if the process lacks clarity, the process is not simple.

A lack of clarity ultimately leads to confusion and complexity because there is not coherent direction. When there is no direction, people assume a direction or invent one. The church moves aimlessly and off course.

Simple churches possess a clearly defined process. They are certain about how God has led them to make disciples. The ministry process is a reflection of this certainty.

Simple churches have a crystal-clear process. They work hard to ensure everyone grasps it. Simple church leaders know their church's process and are able to articulate it to others with conviction. They are able to do so because they own the process.

Simple Church | *Thom Rainer, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

## 2

**Movement**

***Movement is the sequential steps in the process that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment.***

Movement is about flow. It is about assimilation. Movement is what causes a person to go to the next step.

Because Movement is the most difficult simple church element to understand, an illustration is in order.

In a relay race the most important part of the race are the **handoffs**. Four runners are on the same team, and each runner's speed is crucial but not nearly as crucial as the handoffs. Relay races are won or lost at the handoffs.

Sometimes the teams with the best runners lose, and teams with the best handoffs win. You have seen it. A team is out in the lead, and then someone drops the baton during a handoff. And the team loses.

***The handoffs are that important.***

Movement is about the handoffs. Movement is what happens in between the programs. Movement is *how* someone is *handed off* from one level of commitment to a greater level of commitment. How a church moves someone from a worship service to a small group is movement. How a church is designed to move a person from being an observer to being a contributor is movement.

Sadly, most churches are like poor relay teams. Instead of caring about the handoffs, they are preoccupied with the programs. They pay little attention to how people are moved to greater levels of commitment. They ignore what happens between the programs.

***Simple churches pay attention to the handoffs.***

They have grasped the truth that assimilation effectiveness is more important than programmatic effectiveness. They know that as the flow of a process increases, so does the potential that people will progress through it. Simple church leaders design a ministry process where the programs are placed as tools along the process.

Vibrant churches have a simple process that produces movement, a process that facilitates the handoffs. The leaders focus on what happens in between the programs as much as they do the programs.

Research confirms that movement is an essential design element in a simple church. According to the data, vibrant and growing churches have already recognized the importance of movement.

Winning teams excel in the handoffs, and so do simple churches. They are experts in designing a simple process that produces movement.

To implement the movement element, church leaders must take a fresh look at the weekly church calendar and the regularly scheduled programs. All programs must be placed in sequential order along the ministry process. This is what creates movement in a ministry process.

## 3

**Alignment**

***Alignment is the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process.***

Alignment to the process means that all ministry departments submit and attach themselves to the same overarching process.

## Simple Church | *Thom Rainer, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

When a church is fully aligned, all ministries are operating from the same ministry blueprint. The ministries not only embrace the simple process, but they are engaged in it. Each ministry department mirrors the process in that particular area.

### ***Without alignment, the church can be a multitude of sub ministries.***

In this case each ministry has its own leaders who are only passionate about their specific ministry. They rarely identify with the entire church but are deeply committed to their own philosophy of ministry.

A church that lacks alignment does not feel like one body. It feels more like a building that houses a wide variety of ministries.

All churches naturally drift away from alignment.

Most of the time it is not addressed. The reasons vary. For one, it is painful to do so because committed people who have been around for a long time are passionate about their particular way of doing ministry. Sadly, they are more passionate for their area than for the church as a whole. Addressing misalignment also takes time and energy - it costs something to address it.

Unfortunately, it costs more **not** to address misalignment.

When misalignment on a car is not addressed, the results are damaging. Tires can blow out while driving. Damage to the wheels can occur. The same is true for a church. When misalignment is not addressed, there is damage.

Research indicates that simple churches practice alignment - they intentionally fight the drift into misalignment. They insist that each staff member and each ministry embrace and execute their simple ministry process.

## 4

### **Focus**

***Focus is 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.

While movement is the most difficult simple church element to understand, focus is the most difficult element to implement. It takes deep conviction and guts. Focus does not make church leaders popular.

Simple churches have a clearly defined process. The process is designed to move people to higher levels of commitment, and it is implemented in each department of the church so there is alignment. Clarity, movement, and alignment are essential.

But these three elements are ineffective without focus.

### ***Focus is the element that gives power and energy to clarity, movement, and alignment.***

Without focus, the church becomes cluttered despite its process. Without focus, the process is unrecognizable because so many other programs and events surround it. Without focus, the process is buried somewhere underneath a myriad of special events and activities.



## Simple Church | *Thom Rainer, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

Simple churches abandon all that is outside of the simple process because it threatens to steal attention and energy from what has been determined as necessary. Events, activities, and programs outside the process cause people to move in multiple directions. A lack of focus leads to scattering.

Simple church leaders are focused people. They are not mean, and they don't necessarily like saying "no." They are just committed to the simple process that God has given that particular church.

Simple church leaders ask the difficult questions. They want to be sure something will fit neatly in the ministry process before it is implemented. They seek to funnel new ideas into their ministry process instead of beginning new paradigms.

They view everything through the lens of the simple process. They admittedly have blinders on. They are sometimes accused of being narrow-minded. They focus on being simple.

### ***Simple churches have focus.***

Vibrant and growing churches are much more focused than the typical church. While focus is necessary, it is not easy. Even after years of establishing a simple ministry process, the focus element will be tested and questioned.

**Four Steps to Becoming a Simple Church**

The authors conclude *Simple Church* with four steps to becoming a simple church. The intent of these steps is to summarize the actions described in the book and frame the transition for you.

<b>Step 1: Design a Simple Process – Clarity</b>
<b>Step 2: Place Your Key Programs Along the Process – Movement</b>
<b>Step 3: Unite All Ministries Around the Process – Alignment</b>
<b>Step 4: Begin to Eliminate Things Outside the Process – Focus</b>

Imagine a church where you, as a leader, can articulate clearly how someone moves from being a new Christian to becoming 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 a church would be a revolutionary church.**

### ***Welcome to the revolution.***

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## Simple Church | *Thom Rainer, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

### Recommended Resources

1. **Read** a blog post by Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini discussing five primary sources of distraction in ministry that work against the concepts of *Simple Church*.
2. *Simple Church* author Eric Geiger created a Process Design Survey designed to help you evaluate your church's process. A process design is how you have structured and designed your church to move people towards spiritual maturity. Upon **completion of this anonymous survey**, you will be given your score along with feedback and suggestions for improving your process.
3. **Read** and use this simple three-step plan, written by Pastor's Today editor Craig Webb, to facilitate a discussion of the *Simple Church* concepts in a one-day, overnight, or weekend retreat with your church staff or key leaders.
4. **Read** the introduction to Simple Church –The Simple Revolution Has Begun.

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## Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

### Vision Clarity Connection

Recently, I showed an acquaintance a worship bulletin from a large church and asked for her impression. She said it looked like a lot was going on but felt herself jumping from one announcement to another with no real sense of connection or understanding of what her next step should be. Despite the variety of options in front of her, she asked an innocent question: “How do I plug in?”

In *Simple Church*, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger challenge readers to design church strategies with Clarity, Movement, Alignment, and Focus, so people know their next steps and naturally move through a process of spiritual maturation.

The over-programmed example above is common in many churches. To help stimulate personal and corporate “growth,” we add more and more programs attempting to meet our people’s needs, while unintentionally becoming complex, confusing, and counter-productive. We get the *ends* (what people are becoming) mixed up with the *means* (programs they attend). As Rainer and Geiger describe, our preoccupation can be on the programs themselves instead of on designing clear entry points and “handoffs” that step people from one level of commitment to the next (see page 151). This type of movement occurs when leaders simplify strategies and align a clear sequence of programs with relationship bridges that help people easily move to the next stage of spiritual commitment.

E.F. Schumacher once mused, “Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius — and a lot of courage — to move in the opposite direction.”

If we were to take a minute to step back from our busy lives as leaders, what would our honest assessment be of how people experience our churches? When they look at us, do they see complexity? Are we unintentionally treating our people even *violently* through information whiplash — or do they see genius in simple next steps that lead them to drink more deeply from the well?

Paradoxically, that simplicity, if crafted carefully, strategically, and with an eye toward continuous improvement, is a major factor to shepherding people to a deeper walk with Christ than ever before. That simplicity fosters breadth and depth of discipleship.

### Go Ahead

**The authors describe four critical elements to designing a simple church strategy:** Clarity, Movement, Design, and Focus. Read the definitions of these (listed earlier in this SUMS). Ask your leadership team to individually score each element from 1-5 at your church (1 = we’re not good at all at this; 5 = we’re fantastic at this). Total the scores and discuss.

**Howard Hendricks stressed that adding 500 or 1,000 people (or more) to your church whose future spiritual growth rate is zero is the same as having no growth at all. 500 or 1,000 x zero = zero!** Ask your team to take out a blank sheet of paper and quickly list different things your church measures. Compile the results and discuss. Does your church lean toward measuring attendance, buildings, baptisms, and/or dollars — or traits of spiritual growth among your people? In other words, do your measurements clearly focus on what your people are *becoming* on a defined path of discipleship?

**How clear is your vision to simplify your church’s structure and align strategies with your mission, values, and measures?** Would you like some objective help to discuss where you stand and possible next steps to take? Call or email me for a free one-hour assessment. I’d love to learn about your unique challenges and opportunities.





## More About Clint Grider

Highly regarded as a “vision optimizer,” Clint can keenly identify the key people and strengths that are at the core of an organization’s culture. With this discernment, he guides leaders through a vision process that results in meaningful results and sustainable momentum. Bringing the gifts of encouragement and creativity to the process, he helps teams advance vision through increased passion and ownership. Blending this ability with years of experience building healthy organizations, Clint guides churches and non-profits to realize big dreams.

Clint has served in leadership and campaign roles for over twenty years in a wide range of non-profit organizations and ministries including the local church, major universities, and national parachurch organizations. He received his bachelor’s in business administration and marketing from Baylor University, master’s in educational psychology from Baylor, and Ph.D. in educational administration with specializations in process improvement and strategic planning from Texas A&M University.

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