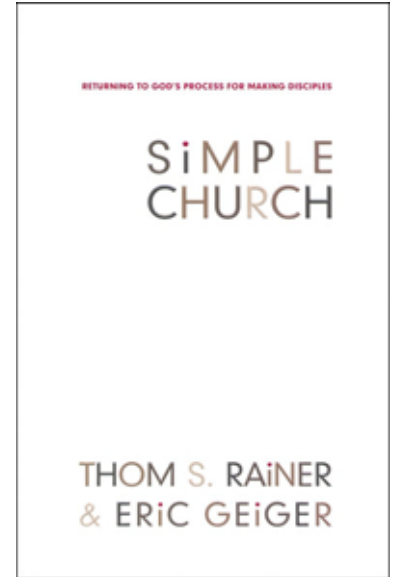


Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples

Discussion Guide for Pastors, Staff, and Church Leaders

Instructions

1. Visit www.lifeway.com/simplechurch, download and read the first chapter of *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* by Thom Rainer & Eric Geiger, and watch the video of Dr. Rainer discussing the main concepts (free of charge).
2. Obtain a copy of the book *Simple Church*. Read Chapters 1-4 of the book and answer the discussion questions at the end of the chapters.
3. You may be assigned one chapter in part 2 of the book (chapters 5-8). If so, come prepared to do the following:
 - a. Share a **summary** of your assigned chapter.
 - b. **Lead a discussion** of the chapter using the provided study questions.



Overview of *Simple Church*:

The simple revolution has begun.

From the design of the iPod to the uncluttered Google home page, simple ideas are changing the world.

Simple Church clearly calls for Christians to return to the simple gospel-sharing methods of Jesus. No bells or whistles required, so to speak.

Based on case studies of four hundred American churches, authors Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger prove that the process for making disciples has quite often become too complex.

Simple churches are thriving, and they are doing so by taking these four ideas to heart:

Clarity

Movement

Alignment

Focus

Note: The following discussion guide includes the study questions found at the end of each chapter of *Simple Church*.



Chapter 1 **The Simple Revolution Has Begun**



After hundreds of consultations with local churches and a significant research project, we have concluded that church leaders need to simplify. They are constantly asking, “How can we make all this work? How can we put all the pieces together?” Many of the church leaders we talk to are seeking an escape from the not-so-simple life. (Page 4)



1. In the culture how have you seen people respond to simple?
2. In what ways do you relate to Pastor Rush?
3. If you could give Pastor Rush some advice, what would it be?
4. Is our church simple or complex? Why?
5. Why is it so hard to see the big picture in ministry?
6. What do you think is required to design a process for church ministry?
7. Where do we fit on this continuum?

Programmer ----- Designer



...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.

Conversely, complex churches are struggling and anemic. Churches without a process or with a complicated process for making disciples are floundering. As a whole, cluttered and complex churches are not alive. Our research shows that these churches are not growing. Unfortunately, the overprogrammed and busy church is the norm. (Page 14)



Chapter 2 **The Simple (and Not-So-Simple) Church in Action**



We leave First Church impressed with the staff and the members. Their commitment to Christ is real. But so many of the people at First Church are tired and confused on how to “do church.”

Likewise, we leave Cross Church impressed with the people and the members. But we did not see weariness and frustration on the faces of the people at Cross Church. Instead we saw excitement, joy, and anticipation.



Two real churches. Two very different experiences. (page 55)

1. How are we like First Church?
2. How are we like Cross Church?
3. Which church would you rather serve? Attend?
4. What advice would you give the pastor at First Church?
5. Describe the concept of process. Why is it important?
6. How can a ministry process help us eliminate some things?
7. How can a ministry process unite a staff?

Chapter 3 **Simple Church: An Extreme Makeover**



Church leaders must craft opportunities where people will encounter the grace of God. Simple church leaders are designers, not programmers. They excel in designing a ministry process that leads to spiritual growth and vitality.

Spiritual growth is a process. It always has been. Thus, it would make sense for church leaders to design their churches around the process of spiritual growth. (Page 59)



1. What is our church's ministry process?
2. Is our process clear? Does it have clarity?
3. Does our process effectively move people toward greater levels of commitment?
4. Is our process implemented in all areas of our church? Are we aligned around our process?
5. How focused is our church?
6. What would Hezekiah think of our church?



The goal is to partner with God to move people through the stages of spiritual growth. Changed lives are the bottom line, the intended end result. Christ formed in people is the goal.

A simple church understands that people are at different places in their spiritual journey, that spiritual growth is a process. The church is designed to partner with God to move people through stages of spiritual growth. (Page 62)



Chapter 4 **Three Simple Stories**

Immanuel Baptist Church in Glasgow, Kentucky

Christ Fellowship in Miami, Florida

Northpoint Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia

1. Why is it much easier to begin as a simple church than it is to become one?
2. What is the relationship between focus and excellence in ministry?
3. What common factors exist in these three churches?
4. What differences emerge?
5. Of the four simple church elements—clarity, movement, alignment, and focus—which will be the most difficult to implement in our church?

Why?

6. What does the movement of the gospel look like in our community?

Chapter 5 **Clarity:** Starting with a Ministry Blueprint

(Assigned to _____)

Your Assignment: Be prepared to share a summary of chapter 5 in *Simple Church* and be prepared to lead a discussion of the chapter using the following study questions:

1. According to our weekly programs, what kind of disciples are we trying to make?

2. Is there a defined process at our church?

If so, what is it?

How is each of our weekly programs used?

3. What is the illustration or metaphor we most often use to describe spiritual growth?

4. How do we measure success at our church? What are we looking for?

5. On a scale of one to ten (with ten being the highest), what is the level of process understanding in our church?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10

6. What should we do in response to the things learned in this chapter?

7. Are we tour guides or travel agents?



If you want your process to be clear, you must define it, illustrate it, discuss it, and measure it. You must also constantly monitor the understanding of your people in regard to your process. (Page 111)



CLARITY \implies MOVEMENT \implies ALIGNMENT \implies FOCUS

Chapter 6 **Movement:** Removing Congestion

(Assigned to _____)

Your Assignment: Be prepared to share a summary of chapter 6 in *Simple Church* and be prepared to lead a discussion of the chapter using the following study questions:

1. What has been our view of spiritual growth?

Does it match 2 Corinthians 3:13?

2. Is our church congested?

Where?

3. Are our programs placed along a process?

4. What is the sequence of our programming?

5. Do we have a clear step for new believers?

6. What should we do about our new members class or lack of one?



Simple church leaders have designed their simple process with movement in mind. The ministry process moves people to greater levels of commitment—with ever-increasing levels of discipleship. The simple process moves people through the process of spiritual transformation.

According to our research, there is a significant relationship between the vitality of a local church and the movement of the church's ministry process. *Movement is the sequential steps in the process that causes people to move to greater areas of commitment.* (Page 139)



CLARITY ⇨ MOVEMENT ⇨ ALIGNMENT ⇨ FOCUS

Chapter 7 **Alignment:** Maximizing the Energy of Everyone

(Assigned to _____)

Your Assignment: Be prepared to share a summary of Chapter 7 in *Simple Church* and be prepared to lead a discussion of the chapter using the following study questions

1. Describe the best team experience you have ever had. What made it so special?
2. How have you seen disunity harm a church?
3. Why is unity around a ministry approach important?
4. On a scale of one to ten, how aligned is our leadership around our simple ministry process?
5. How comfortable are we with accountability?
6. What would “the same process everywhere” mean to our programming?



According to our research, there is a highly significant relationship between church vitality and alignment. In this chapter you will be given five essentials to alignment. All five flow from the research data.

If you want to maximize everyone’s energy, you must recruit on the process, offer accountability, implement the same process everywhere, unite leaders around the process, and ensure that new ministries fit.



CLARITY ⇨ MOVEMENT ⇨ ALIGNMENT ⇨ FOCUS

Chapter 8 **Focus:** Saying No to Almost Everything

(Assigned to _____)

Your Assignment: Be prepared to share a summary of Chapter 8 in *Simple Church* and be prepared to lead a discussion of the chapter using the following study questions:

1. What programs are nonessential in our ministry process?
2. What prevents us from eliminating?
3. How could our approach to special events be altered?
4. Why is saying no difficult in ministry?
5. Will the majority of our people understand our ministry process before focus takes place, as focus is taking place, or after focus has occurred?
6. As a steward of people's time and money, what is God speaking to me about?



People within a church are able to move through the process of spiritual transformation when they truly get it. So as a church leader, you must make sure your process can stick in the minds of your people. People should be able to nod their heads when they hear it.

It is vital that your process be understood because you will be saying no to everything else. No is easier to accept when the reasoning is clear. If people understand the commitment to the simple process, they will be more likely to embrace the decisions that accompany such focus. (Page 223)



CLARITY \Rightarrow MOVEMENT \Rightarrow ALIGNMENT \Rightarrow FOCUS

Chapter 9 **Becoming Simple**



There is a tension here, isn't there?

On one hand, you must move to simple as fast as you can. So much depends on it. The longer you are complex, the longer your focus is divided. If you remain complex, your process for transformation remains unclear. The longer you are complex, the longer your church is congested. People remain unchanged. And this bothers you. It should.

On the other hand, you must move to simple slowly. You have the heart of a shepherd, and you care for the people in your church. Becoming simple will be painful for some people. They cannot imagine losing some of the traditions and programs. (Page 230)



1. What is the relationship between complexity and mediocrity?
2. How complex are we?
3. How receptive to change are our leaders?
4. How receptive to change is our entire church?
5. How long do you think each transition step would take at our church?

About the Authors of *Simple Church*

Thom S. Rainer, Ph.D., is the president and CEO of [LifeWay Christian Resources](http://www.lifeway.com), one of the largest Christian resource companies in the world. He has consulted with more than five hundred churches, served as pastor in four churches and interim pastor in seven churches, and spoken in hundreds of venues. His publications include sixteen books and hundreds of articles. He and his wife, Nellie Jo, live in Nashville. They have three grown sons: Sam, Art, and Jess.

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