

RETURNING TO GOD'S PROCESS FOR MAKING DISCIPLES

SIMPLE CHURCH

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ONE

The Simple Revolution Has Begun

Out of complexity, find simplicity.

~ ALBERT EINSTEIN

Relax. This book is not about another church model. If you are a church leader, you have been exposed to plenty of models. Most of them are on your shelf. Or worse, you have blended a bunch of models into one schizophrenic plan. If that is the case, neither you nor the people in your church are really sure what your church is all about. We see it all the time.

Go ahead, let down your guard. No new program is going to be pushed. There will be nothing new to add to your calendar. If anything, you will be encouraged to eliminate some things, to streamline. This book will help you design a simple process of discipleship in your church. It will help you implement the model you have chosen. It will help you simplify.

Keep your eyes on the words at the beginning of each chapter. Four simple words. Clarity. Movement. Alignment. Focus. Those four words will speak volumes before we conclude the book.

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.

The Not So Simple Life

Pastor Rush is on his way home from a conference on church ministry. He loved the time away, the challenging messages, and the extended times of prayer and worship. But he hates how he feels right now. The conference notebook sits on his lap filled with all that he learned and all that he wants to do. He wants to open it, but he can't. He wants to think about the future, but his mind is filled with the details surrounding the rest of this week.

As the plane takes off, he only feels the weight of the responsibilities that await him. Somewhere between ten thousand and thirty thousand feet, he puts the notebook (and his dreams) in his bag.

It is Wednesday afternoon. He feels a little guilty not being at the weekly visitation program last night. He feels more guilty for enjoying the night off. The Tuesday night visitation program was his baby, his paramount program, when he came to the church several years ago. It soon became the passion of many people in the church. He is grateful those people caught his passion and feels like a traitor for resenting the additional night away from home.

Tonight, he has to (wishes he wanted to) lead the prayer meeting at church. He tells himself he will share something God taught him in a personal devotion. By doing so he will have time to return some phone calls before the prayer meeting.

Experience tells him the messages on his desk and the e-mails on his computer will be many. He knows they are already there.

The financial team is meeting after the prayer meeting, so he will not be home until after 9:00. He does not lead the meeting, but he needs to be there. Hopefully his kids will still be awake when he gets home.

Tomorrow morning he is having breakfast with one of the men on the church board. He does not know what it is about, but he thinks it will only add more to his mounting list of responsibilities.

Then there is a staff meeting and maybe some hospital visits. Tomorrow night he and his wife are in a small group. He has recently encouraged everyone in the church to be in a small group, and he wants to lead by example. He genuinely loves the group when he gets there, and he wishes it did not feel burdensome. He asked each staff person to be in a small group and prays they don't feel the same way he does right now.

He has little work done on his message for the upcoming Sunday morning worship services. He is in the middle of a series on relationships. He taught on relating to your spouse last week, and he longs to live out some of the practical principles he shared: date nights, picnics, and so forth.

He wants to make that happen in some way this week. Friday night could work. He commits to pass on the invitation to attend one of the local high school sporting events. He knows that will disappoint one of the board members who has encouraged him to be more visible in the community.

Saturday afternoon, after his son's ball game, he will spend much of the day on his message. It looks like another "Saturday night special" is in store for the Sunday morning crowd.

This weekend he is going to speak on relating to lost neighbors. He wishes he had some personal stories to share, but life

has just been so busy lately. He thinks of all the times he has pulled into the garage after late nights at church or church-related activities. He hasn't met the new couple two doors down. He tells himself they just moved in a few weeks ago but then remembers it was six months ago, at least.

He knows that if he is not relating to his neighbors and inviting them to Christ and to church, he cannot ask his congregation to do so. He wrestles with changing his message, but he has already announced what he is going to preach. He shakes his head and slumps a little lower in the seat.

He is tempted to witness to the person sitting next to him on the plane just to get a personal story for his message—nothing like a good airplane story to get a crowd going. He rebukes himself for the improper motivation. The passenger is asleep anyway. Must be nice.

Pastor Rush reaches back into his bag. He pushes the conference notebook aside and grabs a legal pad.

He has the weekly staff meeting after his breakfast appointment. This will be the only time he has to prepare for it. He decides to keep it brief, jotting down only a few items to discuss. He knows there are some staff issues that need to be dealt with, but he does not have the time or emotional energy to raise them.

He begins to think about his message for Sunday night (which is different from Sunday morning). He has taken some criticism lately for the quality of his Sunday night messages. He understands why. They have been underdeveloped. He is trying to work on them earlier in the week, taking some of the time away from the Sunday morning message preparation.

This Sunday night there is a neighborhood block party. His wife will go while he is at church. He thinks, *At least one of us*

knows our neighbors. Of course, people will wonder why she was not at church. The tension is mounting. He slumps deeper into the seat.

He knows there has to be a better way. He knows it and continually admits it to himself and the Lord. But there is no time to discover *it* (whatever *it* may be), much less time to put *it* into action.

Like other conferences, Pastor Rush was impressed but is coming home almost depressed.

During these times, Pastor Rush has disciplined himself to remember his calling into ministry. When he was in his early twenties, he committed his life to vocational ministry. He mentally goes back to those days when he wrestled with his career path.

God had given him an unquenchable passion for the church, for the Word, and for people. He knew God had set him apart to serve the church. He still does. He still has a deep burden. The nagging in his heart to make disciples through the ministry of the local church is still there. That conviction has not wavered, only grown. But he knows so many things have been placed beside it, even on top of it.

Yet, he is in this for people.

At thirty thousand feet Pastor Rush is thinking of people in his church. He is praying and thinking. Some tough questions are emerging. Are the people in his church being transformed? Is his church making real disciples, the kind of disciples Jesus made? Or is everyone just busy?

He glances over at the sleeping passenger next to him. On his lap is the airline's magazine, and it is opened to a full-page advertisement for a popular media device. The top of the advertisement says *Simple*. Out of curiosity Pastor Rush pulls

the same magazine out of the seat pocket in front of him. He finds the page to further examine the advertisement. It is interesting. He snickers.

Simple sure sounds good.

The Revolution

Simple is in.

Complexity is out. Out of style at least.

Ironically people are hungry for simple because the world has become much more complex. The amount of information accessible to us is continually increasing. The ability to interact with the entire world is now possible. Technology is consistently advancing at a rapid pace.

The result is a complicated world with complex and busy lives. And, in the midst of complexity, people want to find simplicity. They long for it, seek it, pay for it, even dream of it. Simple is in. Simple works. People respond to simple.

The simple revolution has begun.

Apple knows this.

They are pioneers of simple. They are a part of the revolution against complexity, pushing it forward on the technological front. Pick up an iPod and find one big button. Connect it to your Apple desktop, and music automatically downloads. Plug your printer cable into the USB port, and you are ready to go. "Plug and play," the mantra of a computer generation hungry for simple.

Even Apple's graphic design is simple. Look at the logo. An apple with one color has replaced the former multicolored apple. Their artwork on their products and in their stores is subtle. Their cultlike followers are vocal missionaries to the

simplicity they offer. If you know someone with an Apple, you know what we mean. You have been prodded to join Apple's part in the simple revolution.

The iPod is a case study in action. If you are unfamiliar with an iPod, it's a portable music or video device that can be listened to with headphones or in a vehicle. It is the symbol of the present generation and is simpler than any eight-track, cassette player, or CD player. In an amazing coup that other companies are admittedly mimicking, Apple was able to take advanced technology and make it simple.

The outward design has only one circular button. It has four touch points surrounding the circle and one touch point in the middle, but it looks like one button. The iPod is more expensive and offers less performance than many of the devices sold by competitors, but it dominates the market. It is simple, and people respond to it.

The iMac is further proof. The iMac is Apple's version of a desktop computer. The attraction is that all the components of a computer are consolidated into one. The monitor contains the central processing unit, the speakers, the network and USB ports, and the CD-ROM. It comes in a single box with a keyboard and mouse. This simplicity makes the buying decision easy. There is one choice.

It is simple to assemble because of the few parts. Since Apple makes the software that comes with the iMac, there is one number to call if something goes wrong. One decision. One box. One contact. One price. Simple.

Google knows this.

Google is one of the fastest-growing companies in American history. It has made sophisticated technology behind Internet searching simple and speedy to users. The popularity of

Google has skyrocketed as Web users are flocking to use the search engine. People love and respond to the simple look of Google's search engine. Perhaps as much as 75 percent of all Web searches are done on Google. They are in clear command of the search market. For Google (and its investors), the simple revolution has been very rewarding.

The amount of white space on their home page screams simplicity. Click on google.com and only twenty to forty words are found on their home page. That's it. It is simple taken to a whole new level. If *simple supersized* were not an oxymoron, we would use it here. Compare Google's look to other search engines such as YAHOO! or MSN where users are confronted with hundreds of words on the opening page.

Google keeps its search page simple for the sake of the user. The philosophy behind the simplicity is that users are unable to effectively process too much information, that too much information is slow and cumbersome. Google believes users should not be assaulted with information that is not relevant or applicable to them.¹

Graphic designers know this.

Graphic art has reacted toward the complexity and clutter of the postmodern era by embracing what some have called "the new simplicity."² Glance at some of the top graphic design magazines such as *I.D.* or *How*, and you will see hints of the simple revolution.

Or just take a look at simple revolutionary John Maeda, a leader in the graphic world. Maeda is a professor of design at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1999, *Esquire* magazine recognized him as one of the twenty-one most important people for the twenty-first century. He is also the 2001 recipient of the United States' highest career honor for design, the

National Design Award, and Japan's highest career honor, the Mainichi Design Prize.

Not only is Maeda one of the world's most renowned graphic designers; he is also an advocate of simple. He codirects SIMPLICITY, an experimental research program at the Media Lab at MIT. The research is designed to develop technology that is simple to understand and operate. The goal of the project is to help users break free from the intimidating complexity and information overload of modern technology. It is a funded revolt against complexity. Maeda also writes regularly on his Web log, his online diary. The name of the Web log, as you guessed, is *simplicity*.

Southwest Airlines know this.

Southwest is North America's most successful and profitable airline. It is also the most simple. There are no assigned seats, just groups. And the groups are based on the passenger's arrival time. Food is minimal.

There are also no hubs. The planes fly the shortest distance between two points. In other words, you won't be stopping in Atlanta or Chicago on every flight. All of this simplicity saves the passenger time and makes the company money.³

Papa John's knows this.

Papa John's makes great pizza. According to the founder, John Schattner, the secret to the company's success has been its simplicity. Look at this statement found on their Web site:

At Papa John's we have a simple formula for success: Focus on one thing and try to do it better than anyone else. By keeping the Papa John's menu simple, we are able to focus on the quality of our product by using only superior-quality ingredients.⁴

People have embraced the simple menu and the simple philosophy. What began as one store just over twenty years ago has mushroomed into the third largest pizza franchise in the United States.

Interior designers know this.

Real Simple is the name of a popular interior design magazine and Web site (www.realsimple.com). People are responding to the concept. *Real Simple* has been the most successful magazine launch in a decade. The magazine promotes simple interior design and instructs readers how to keep their house, kitchen, and meals simple.

Even the king (or queen) of interior design, Martha Stewart, knows simple. Not because she lived the simple life in a prison cell but because she advocates simple design. *Perfect* and *simple* are two words commonly heard on her program and seen in her articles.

At least, that is what our wives tell us. We don't claim to know about Martha firsthand.

Marketing gurus know this.

Marketing and advertising executives are using simple slogans and advertising pieces. You know that because you have seen it. That is not all though. The revolution goes deeper than that. They are marketing their products as solutions for our complicated lives. The message is: "This product will simplify your life." They know people respond to simple.

In a notable marketing book, *Simplicity Marketing*, Steven Cristol and Peter Sealey teach executives to position their products to promise customers a more simple life.⁵ They argue that an effective brand will reduce the stress of the customer. The value that many products offer is clutter reduction.

Take for example the marketing of the South Beach Diet. The diet market is cluttered. New diets and weight-loss strategies come along all the time, but South Beach promised the potential dieter something other plans failed to deliver: simplicity and less stress.

The founder and author of the South Beach Diet movement explains the essence of his diet this way: “What started as a part-time foray into the world of nutrition has led me to devise a simple, medically-sound diet that works, without stress, for a large percentage of those who try it.”⁶ Did you see it? Simple and stress-free. Besides a way for favorite desserts to actually be sugar-free, what more could dieters ask for?

OK. By now you get the point. Simple is in. Simple works. People respond to simple. But this book is directed to those passionate about effective church ministry. Does this simple revolution have any significance to churches and church leaders?

Keep reading.

Growing and vibrant churches know this.

In our extensive research of more than four hundred evangelical churches, we discovered the simple church revolution. We compared growing and vibrant churches to nongrowing and struggling churches. Church leaders from both groups completed the same survey, which was designed to measure how simple their church discipleship process was.

We anticipated that the vibrant churches would score higher. 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 found something big.

There will be more discussion of the study in chapters to come, but here is the elevator conversation: 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. Statistical people call this a relationship at the .001 level.

When a researcher finds a relationship at the .05 level, he calls his friends and brags. He knows he has found something worthwhile. When a researcher finds something at the .01 level, he calls his publicist and prepares to write. Finding something at the .001 level does not happen often. It's a big deal. If you're a stats person, it is "highly significant."

The significance is 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.

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. The simple church is the exception, yet our research shows that should not be the case.

The simple church revolution has begun.

Most churches are too busy to notice. They are on the outskirts of the movement, far removed from the revolution that is unfolding.

What We Are Not Saying

First, we are not suggesting that the simple approach to ministry is a change in doctrine or conviction. Thom has written several books on the primacy of sound, biblical, and

orthodox doctrine in growing churches. On that issue we do not compromise.

Second, we are not saying that churches should become simple because it is in style or culturally hip. A revolution goes against the cultural grain. Churches that are simple are not mirroring the culture. They are not mimicking the world in order to reach the world.

In fact, the opposite is true. You must get this.

The culture is not simple. Not even close. Our world is not simple. Daily we experience information and decision overload. As the world is getting smaller and smaller (globalization through technology), things are getting more and more complex. In the midst of all the noise, all the rush, all the change, all the busyness, and all the uncertainty, people long for simplicity.

Precisely because things are so hectic and out of control people respond to simple. The busyness and complexity of life makes simple a great commodity, something desired. Simple churches intuitively know this. And because they are consumed with the call to make disciples, they have implemented a simple design for church ministry. They have designed a simple process to reach and mature people. Thus, these churches are getting people's attention and commitment.

Third, we also are not saying that churches should have a simple process just for pragmatic reasons (though it is working). More importantly, there is a theological and philosophical foundation on which a simple process stands. We will deal with this throughout the book, but here is a snapshot: While God never changes, He has chosen to work through a divine process.

For example, God chose to create the universe in a sequential and orderly process. He also designed His creation's maturation,

including man, to occur in process. Spiritual growth (sanctification) is the process of a believer being transformed into the image of Christ. Simple churches have chosen to align themselves with the way God works. They have chosen to partner with the discipleship process revealed in Scripture. They have chosen to structure their churches around a simple process.

Fourth, we are also not claiming that a simple church design is easy. There is a big difference between simple and easy. Simple is basic, uncomplicated, and fundamental. Easy is effortless.

Ministry will never be easy. It is messy and difficult because people are messy and difficult. A simple process is not easy to implement or maintain. Leadership in the local church is extremely challenging. Leading a local church is neither easy nor simple, but the church strategy does not need to be complicated. The ministry design can and should be simple.

The Revolutionary

If anyone knows simple, it is Jesus.

If anyone is a revolutionary, it is Jesus. He is the original simple revolutionary. He stepped into a complicated and polluted religious scene. It was cluttered with Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians, Zealots, and Essenes. He did not play by their rules. He could not stand their hypocrisy. He preferred spending time with tax collectors and sinners.

The religious leaders had developed a religious system with 613 laws. They chose the number 613 because that was how many separate letters were in the text containing the Ten Commandments. Then they found 613 commandments in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). They divided the list into affirmative commands (do this) and negative commands (don't do this).

There were 248 affirmative commands, one for every part of the human body, as they understood it. There were 365 negative commands, one for each day of the year. They further divided the list into binding commands and nonbinding commands. Then they spent their days debating whether the divisions were accurate and ranking the commands within each division.⁷

Enter Jesus. Jesus has the ability to take the complex and make it simple. A prime example is Matthew 22:37–40, where Jesus gives what has become known as the Great Commandment. Here is the scene. Jesus has just stumped the Sadducees. Literally. He silenced them by His wisdom (Matt. 22:34). Next up are the Pharisees. Maybe they can do a better job knocking this revolutionary down.

The Pharisees gather for a meeting. They devise a debate strategy. Their goal is to humiliate Jesus in front of the crowd. They choose their smartest guy, a lawyer, to take on Jesus. He asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the Law. Of all the 613 commandments, he is asking Jesus for the greatest. Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments.”

Think about the significance of that moment. He said all the Law (and He added the Prophets) is summed up in this simple and perfect phrase. He was not lowering the standard of the Law. He was not abolishing it. He was capturing all its spirit, all of its essence, in one statement. He said all of it hangs on this. He summed up 613 commands in two. Jesus took the complexity and the advancement of the Law and made it very simple.

His Yoke

Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher. In the Jewish culture each rabbi had a yoke of teaching. His yoke was His instructions, His content, and His message. Many rabbis put yokes of teaching on the people that were impossible and legalistic. These yokes pushed people away from the grace of God instead of toward it.

These yokes burned people out and turned people off. Jesus stepped into the scene and said to a crowd one day:

Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and
learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in
heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My
yoke is easy and My burden is light.

(Matt. 11:28–30)

Jesus said His yoke is easy. His teaching was in stark contrast to the religious rabbis of the day. He was not offering a complicated and long set of rules, rituals, and regulations. He was offering grace. He was offering a simple relationship with God.

Jesus and Clutter

As a simple revolutionary, Jesus was bothered by meaningless and distracting clutter. On at least one occasion, Jesus cleansed the temple. Many biblical scholars believe He did so twice during His earthly ministry.

Mark 11 gives the account of one of His cleaning projects. Jesus was enraged by what He observed in the temple. The temple had the appearance of being a place where people would seek God, but this was not the reality. People had lost their focus. Mark describes three areas of clutter that infuriated Jesus.

First, people were buying and selling in the temple. The people who came to worship God had to buy sacrifices. The leaders allowed vendors to set up shop in the temple. Historians reveal that vendors were typically set up outside the temple. Now the makeshift marketplace is inside the temple. Jesus responded by driving out those who were selling doves.

Second, money changers were exchanging currency for the Gentiles. The Gentiles needed Jewish money to buy sacrifices, and they were exploited with a fee for the exchange. Instead of the temple being a house of prayer for the Gentiles (all nations), it was cluttered with people robbing them financially. Jesus reacts by throwing over the tables of the money changers.

Third, the temple had become a shortcut for people to pass through the city. People were actually using the court of the Gentiles as a shortcut to carry things. Jesus stopped them.

His behavior in the temple gives us amazing insight into the heart of God. Jesus is adamantly opposed to anything that gets in the way of people encountering Him. He quoted from Isaiah that day saying, "Is it not written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of thieves'!" (Mark 11:17).

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.

What about your church?

Fancy Coffins

In Matthew 23 Jesus confronted the leaders of spiritual hypocrisy and complexity. He told the Pharisees that they were like a fancy cup that is dirty. Everything looked good on the

outside, but inwardly everything was disgusting. He also told them that they were like whitewashed tombs or top-of-the-line coffins. On the outside everything was shiny. Everything was presentable. But beneath the surface there was death. Beneath the surface there was emptiness.

Just like many churches.

The clutter can often make things look OK, even good. The busyness is a great disguise for the lack of life. The complexity is a great cover-up. Churches can sometimes be fancy coffins.

Several of the complex church leaders we talked with admitted their busy churches were void of life. Several knew their cluttered church calendars lacked direction. Several also admitted that all the activity was having little impact. Often great amounts of activity do not produce life change. It only gives the impression that things are happening, that there is life.

One complex church leader commented, “The project confirmed the reality that I was slow to face: we are not seeing spiritual transformation in the lives of our people. We have become content being busy.”

Another e-mailed us and said, “Completing the survey has shown me how we desperately need to develop a simple process for spiritual transformation. Right now, we just have a lot of programs. I have already begun evaluating all that we presently do.”

Perhaps we are losing ground not *despite* our overabundance of activity but *because* of it.

The Not-So-Simple Life II

Pastor Rush is now in his office. Before he returns the phone calls and e-mails, he decides to empty his bag. He pulls

out his conference notebook along with some CDs and workbooks he purchased. He moves the materials to a place on his bookshelf.

The new materials are now sitting neatly next to other conference notebooks. He has seen plenty of church models and programs. Most of it is good stuff, and most of it has worked somewhere. Just not here. Not yet, anyhow. Not like he has dreamed, imagined, and prayed.

He recalls the advice of a speaker at a conference to take the best ideas from other churches and implement those ideas in your own church. He has tried to do that. He has pulled bits and pieces from different church models. He has implemented an array of programs. Pastor Rush's church is experiencing ministry schizophrenia.

Ministry schizophrenia is not a clinical disease. You will not find it in a psychology book, but it is present in many churches. You have noticed it before, but maybe you did not diagnose it as ministry schizophrenia. It is plaguing the local church. It occurs when churches and church leaders are not sure who they are. They are not clear what their fundamental identity is. They run in a disjointed and frantic fashion.

It occurs most often when churches attempt to blend multiple church models into one. They do so with good intentions. Like Pastor Rush, church leaders are often encouraged to pick and choose the best from a variety of church models. The problem is that the philosophy behind each model varies, sometimes in small ways and sometimes in big ways. Inevitably, the multiple ministry philosophies bump heads. And that is never pretty.

When ministry philosophies collide, schizophrenia happens. The church is unsure of who she is. Programs and ministries move in a multiplicity of directions. It seems as if there

are multiple church personalities. No one really knows what to expect.

Ministry schizophrenia is not an environment conducive to spiritual transformation. People are pulled one way, then another. It is definitely not the picture Paul painted of the church, where the believers would be “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27).

Pastor Rush sits down in his chair, and looks at the bookshelf containing all the resources. He senses the church is not moving in a clear and coherent direction. He knows something must change. He feels pressure. The expectations from board members, staff, and others are great. However, his expectations and his burden are much greater.

Something must change, but Pastor Rush is struggling with where to begin. He understands the *what*. He has a sense of *what* the church should be doing. He believes the church should be committed to evangelism, prayer, helping people build relationships with believers, seeing people grow deeper, serving, and worship.

He also has a sense of the *why*. He deeply desires to see God glorified. He struggles with the *how*. One burning question has entered his mind: *How* can we structure all of this to come together to make disciples?

He is beginning to diagnose the problem. There is no overarching discipleship process that pulls everything together. There is not a clear process in place that streamlines the ministry and keeps everyone on the same page. There is no big picture. Pastor Rush has implemented programs and ministries without asking what they contribute to the whole.

Like many churches, success at Pastor Rush’s church is measured by how well a particular program goes. Parts are

evaluated but never the whole. He has never looked at each weekly program in light of a simple discipleship process. In fact, there is no process. There is no clear beginning and no clear end. There is only a bunch of programs.

Pastor Rush is having one of those “aha, I get it” moments. Maybe you are too. These moments are sacred but also scary. They are sacred because they lead to change. And they are scary because they lead to change.

Simultaneously, Pastor Rush feels both relief and frustration. Relief because he is seeing what the problem is. Frustration because he now knows the problem exists. He and his staff are just running programs. He committed to ministry to make disciples, and he has become a program manager.

He has not looked at the forest because he has been pre-occupied with all the trees. Pastor Rush knows he must step back. He must take a look at his church with fresh eyes.

He must see the whole picture.

Seeing the Whole Picture

Jose Diaz saw the whole picture. One of the happiest days in his life was Sunday morning, August 7, 2005. It occurred at Christ Fellowship in Miami, Florida (the church where Eric serves as executive pastor). For the first time Jose was able to worship sitting next to his father, Luis Diaz. Luis had been a believer for many years, but had never attended church with his son, Jose.

He couldn't. He was in prison, for twenty-six years.

On Sunday, August 7, 2005, they worshipped together. Luis Diaz was released four days earlier because DNA testing had proven his innocence. He had been wrongfully convicted. Because of the evidence, he was no longer considered the Bird

Road rapist. You probably saw the story on the news. It made the national headlines.

The Bird Road rapist was on the prowl from 1977 to 1979. Many victims described him as an English-speaking Latin male, over six feet tall, and weighing approximately two hundred pounds. He sometimes took things from the victims.

After her attack, the first victim saw Luis Diaz at the gas station where she worked.

Four days earlier she provided police with a description: Latin male, six feet tall, about two hundred pounds, English-speaking, with a two-door green or black car. Luis Diaz drove into the gas station in his green four-door Chevrolet. The victim called the police with his license number, and she later identified him as her attacker from his driver license picture. Diaz weighed 134 pounds and was five feet three inches tall. He was married with three children. He spoke no English. At this time no charges were filed.

The attacks continued, and the public grew more and more concerned. The police focused on Diaz. Another victim made an identification of him from a photographic array. He was arrested in August 1979. Two days later fourteen victims viewed a live lineup. Five victims identified Diaz positively. Later several more victims identified Diaz from a video lineup. Prosecutors brought eight charges against him.

Luis Diaz insisted he was innocent and went to trial in May 1980. There was no physical evidence connecting Diaz to the crime. A search of Diaz's home produced no items taken from victims. No weapon was ever found. No semen or blood was found in Diaz's car, though four of the victims had been raped in the attacker's car. Most of the victims had described the attacker as taller and heavier.

Diaz, because of his job as a fry cook, reeked of onions after his night shift. None of the victims described an odor. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Diaz was found guilty and sentenced to multiple life sentences.

In 1993, two victims came forward and recanted their identifications of Diaz. Jose, his son, began researching DNA testing and how it was used to overturn wrongful convictions. He knew his father was innocent. He wrote letters and partnered with groups such as the Innocence Project to produce a motion for DNA testing. DNA tests from two of the victims proved the same person raped them. It was not Diaz.

All charges were dropped, and Diaz was freed after twenty-six years.

Jose Diaz pushed to see the evidence from the testing. Jose Diaz insisted on seeing the whole picture. He saw the forest and not just the trees in the case of his father.

The few testimonies were only one slice of the picture, one tree in the forest. The whole picture involved the physical evidence, the DNA testing, the lack of weapon, and the police profile. The whole picture told a different story. Jose stepped back and looked with fresh eyes. And he got others to do the same. Because Jose was committed to the whole picture, he was a part of freeing his father.

Like Jose Diaz, church leaders are called to free prisoners. Not from physical jail cells but from spiritual ones. Leaders are called to offer freedom to those who are imprisoned by sin (see Luke 4:18).

Like Diaz, church leaders must see the whole picture. Leaders must see the forest and not just the trees. Being simple requires seeing the whole picture. Clutter often exists because church leaders see only part. More and more things are added without an understanding of how it all affects the whole.

To have a simple church, leaders must ensure that everything their church does fits together to produce life change. They must design a simple process that pulls everything together, a simple process that moves people toward spiritual maturity.

Designers

Simple church leaders are designers. They design opportunities for spiritual growth. Complex church leaders are programmers. They run ministry programs.

Church leaders who are programmers focus on one program at a time. Their goal, though never stated, is to make each program the best. Church leaders who are designers are focused on the end result, the overall picture. They are as concerned with what happens between the programs as with the programs themselves.

The simple church leaders we surveyed were expert designers. They were not the producers of spiritual growth and church vitality. Only God is the producer of the growth. But like the apostle Paul, these church leaders are expert builders (see 1 Cor. 3:10). They have skillfully designed an environment where life change is likely to occur. They have designed a simple process that moves people through stages of spiritual growth.

To have a simple church, you must design a simple discipleship process. This process must be clear. It must move people toward maturity. It must be integrated fully into your church, and you must get rid of the clutter around it.

It is much easier to write and read that paragraph than to make it happen. Church leaders struggle with implementing a process. In fact, church leaders admit that this is their biggest ministry struggle. They are the weakest in designing a comprehensive process for their churches.⁸ It is no wonder that the

majority of churches are stagnant or declining. It is hard to see the forest when leaders are constantly bumping into the trees.

Join us on a journey to explore the simple church revolution. Not only will you see the results of the major research study, but you will also learn to be a designer. You will learn to design a simple discipleship process.

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. Welcome to the journey.

At the end of each chapter we have included Group Discussion Questions. We encourage you to wrestle with the concepts presented in this book as a team. Use these questions with staff and/or volunteers that you serve alongside.

— GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

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