

# What Is Simple Church?

6<sup>th</sup> October 2020



## Background Notes

### to help us step into the series

*(Please note - future weeks will not have such lengthy introduction)*

On Sunday Steve introduced the idea of simple Church, Simple Church is not another church model or program, but rather is about ensuring that the church has a simple process for growing people as disciples that everyone is able to understand.

Previously as a church we have spent a lot of time spinning a lot of plates causing a lot of people to feel exhausted and for ministries and activities to feel disjointed (after all how are Girls Brigade and community coffee connected?).

## Jesus

Jesus had a simple ministry, for example, when the Pharisees had extracted 613 commandments from the Bible, He narrowed that law down to 2 commandments: “Love the Lord your God...” and “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

In an age when the teaching of the priests was a heavy burden, Jesus offered an “easy yoke.”

Jesus also disliked “clutter”—he “cleaned out” the temple by throwing out people who were exploiting it financially and using it as a short cut through the city. He was opposed to anything that kept people from getting to Him; anything that drew their focus away from God—He kept his focus and was not side tracked by such things. He addressed the Pharisees and called them whitewashed tombs: looking great on the outside, but disgusting on the inside.

Many churches are this way with their programs: they look great, but their people are not growing and the Gospel is not being advanced, and **in the book we are given the true story example of Pastor Rush**. Pastor Rush realizes that his church is suffering from “ministry schizophrenia”—having so many programs that they don’t know what their identity, focus, or goals are. This environment does not encourage growth. He needs to step back and see the whole picture.

## The Simple (and Not-So-Simple) Church in Action

The authors suggest that you “just have to be there” to “get” a simple church; it can’t happen with an over-the-phone type of consultation. So they invite us to look at two anonymous churches with them one simple and one complex.

“First Church,” has existed over 40 years, is known for its good programs, has small turnover and no major crisis, and has known and notable staff, but has experienced minimal to no growth in the past five years.

The second “Cross Church,” is small and unknown, but has experienced much growth in the past few years.

## **First Church Statements, Pastor Interview, and Leaders**

First Church has a myriad of statements: vision, strategy, purpose, etc... and a brochure and long description to go with everyone, including brochures with statements and missions of each church program. They are all different and it is difficult to discern the church's focus. The pastor is frustrated and feels that the church is disjointed. He wants to see lives changed, but isn't sure how to go about that.

When asked about the focus of their church, the leaders all give different answers, and none can quote their vision statement. There's no obvious discipleship statement, and disciples are not being made.

## **Cross Church Statements, Pastor Interview, and Leaders**

Like First Church, Cross Church has many brochures, newsletters, and bulletins—but on all of them, there is one statement: “Love God, love others, serve the world.” The pastor says this is both the church's purpose and its process; their purpose IS their process. He explains that some years ago he recognized that many problems in his church were caused by lack of focus, so he prayed and decided his one goal was to make disciples. He met with people and they considered the best way to do this, and came up with their church statement.

First, people are brought into a loving relationship with God, which then leads them to love others in community and finally grow to serve others.

When leaders are interviewed, they all express the statement with ease, which is also discussed at meetings and posted in the office. Though personal stories of how that process plays out are varied, it is clear that the stages of the process are the same. The church has pruned its programs down to only the best for each stage of the process, so that it is clear when someone progresses from one stage to the next which program will support him or her at the next stage of growth.

## **Programming at First Church and Cross Church**

First Church has 8 major weekly programs—all good and enjoyable, but so many that the authors question whether members have time to witness to the un-churched, and shortcomings in those programs are clear. (The sound team people are overworked; some rooms aren't clean; etc.)

When members are asked about the purposes of the various programs (like, “How effective is the Christmas play?”), they seem confused, and they don't know which programs are for non-believers or growing Christians, and think of the programs as ends rather than means. They can't articulate a process among their programs where they lead (“What program comes after this one in the growth process?”), what's the beginning, etc.

The authors site Mark 2:27 and write, “Programs were made for man, not man for programs.... The end result must always be about people. Programs should only be tools.”

On the other hand, the programming at Cross Church is clear. Members there worship on Sunday mornings, which are also services to which nonbelievers are invited in order to introduce to them a love of God. To “love others,” the second step in the process, Cross Church employs the program of small groups, which meet weekly. The last stage, “serve the world,” is implemented through service teams. There is only one program for each stage, and a clear process for spiritual growth—each process leads to the next.

## **Staff Meetings, Calendars, Numbers, and New Ideas**

Though the meetings at both churches last for about the same amount of time and are similar in logistical ways, their focus is vastly different. At First Church, a great deal of time is spent dealing with the calendar, because so many programs must be coordinated. Staff must “jockey for a position on the calendar,” each defending their own ministry event. At Cross Church, the calendar takes 5 minutes, because it is so simple—just their three weekly programs, with only one special event that month. Extra time is used to evaluate the ministry process.

When it comes to numbers, First Church has not grown in a long time, but each staff person looks at their own ministry and sees growth and so says that everything is great. At Cross Church, people look at the numbers in each stage of their process and evaluate how many people are moving from one stage to the next, and whether or not growth in each stage is proportional to the growth in the stage before it. The authors describe this as evaluating numbers horizontally, versus vertically, like at First Church. Looking at horizontal growth measures movement; vertical growth does not.

In terms of new ideas, both churches want to implement teaching on marriage because they are worried about their congregants. First Church sets up two weekend conferences that would pull people away from their families and add one more thing to the calendar. Cross Church uses programs they already have—small groups—to implement a new curriculum to help grow people in this area. There are high frustration and low numbers at First Church; low frustration and high numbers at Cross Church.

## Staffing and Announcements

At First Church, the staff members have different ministry philosophies, so although they are all highly qualified and love the Lord, they are a divided team, which creates competition and frustration and hinders movement in the ministry process, because it is disjointed. At Cross Church, staff is recruited based on their passion for the church's process and vision. They may be very driven, qualified, and talented, but if they don't agree with the ministry philosophy, they are not hired, in order to preserve unity.

At First Church, there are umpteen announcements, all purported to be life changing—a lot of busyness! At Cross Church, there are three—all simple and related to the process.

## Defining 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."

"It is **designed**," not carelessly thrown together.

"...designed **around**"—centered on something; it has a goal.

"...designed around a process that is **straightforward**"—easy to grasp, and "**strategic**"—built for execution; for moving people; an action plan tied to the church's vision.

It "**moves people through the stages of spiritual growth**"—they do not stay where they are, and "Christ formed in people is the goal."

In the book the authors describe finding that four elements were essential to designing a simple ministry process (and therefore helping a church flourish): **clarity, movement, alignment, and focus**. They give an expanded definition of a simple church:

*"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**)."*

## Clarity

"Clarity is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people." The process needs to be clear enough and easy enough to understand, because without understanding, people won't commit to it. It needs to be taught and preached often enough that the people have a firm grasp on it. For this to be possible the church *leaders* need to have a firm grasp on it—the process needs to be CLEAR.

## **Movement**

“Movement is the sequential steps in the process that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment.” Movement causes people to go to the next step. It is like the handoffs in a relay race—the race can be won or lost during handoffs, regardless of which team has the best runners. Most churches only pay attention to programs, but it is the movement between them that pushes people toward growth. “Simple church leaders design a ministry process where the programs are placed as tools along the process;” therefore programs are a means and not the end.

## **Alignment**

“Alignment is the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process.” It means all aspects of the church are attached to the same overarching process, and that the entire church is moving as a body in the same direction. Without alignment, there is competition and confusion as to the goal among many sub-ministries, rather than unified movement. Churches naturally drift toward misalignment, but it must be addressed to maintain a healthy church.

## **Focus**

“Focus is the commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process.” “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... A lack of focus leads to scattering.” It also leads to clutter. To maintain focus, leaders must say “no” to things that are good but don’t fit into the process, and because of that, they will sometimes not be very popular and will be called narrow-minded.

## **An Example From Hezekiah,**

Not only did Hezekiah remove the Asherah poles and other idols—something that many church leaders would do—but he also removed something precious and good—the bronze snake that God had told Moses to make—because the people were worshipping it instead of God. He uncluttered worship, to make sure people were worshipping God. A great artist, Hans Hoffman, said, “The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.” Churches need to be uncluttered and simple so that the necessary would stand out.

## Discussion Questions:

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1. First Church and Cross Church – which do you feel is the most similar to CPBC?
2. Pre -Lockdown if you look at our weekly programme of activities, what sort of disciples were we trying to make?
3. What groups did you belong to? And on a scale of 1-10 (10 highest) how important is your group to the life of the church? On a scale of 1-10 9 (10 highest) how effective is your group at making disciples? Why?
4. How do you think we measure church growth at CPBC? Do you think this is the best way to do this?
5. Do you agree with the three core focus... WORSHIP God, GROW Together, SERVE Others? If not what would you suggest and why?
6. 2 Kings 18:4 refers to Hezekiah. Why was the bronze snake significant and why did it matter that it was torn down?

2 Kings 18:4 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

4 He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan (a) )

- a. 2 Kings 18:4 *Nehushtan* sounds like the Hebrew for both *bronze* and *snake*.