

that's my read on *Simple Church* by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger. But that's not going to stop me from trying. The idea is to clear away the clutter, so we can focus on what we really want to accomplish in our ministries. In a busy, complex world we long for simplicity. Think of the Google home page and the iPod. Better yet, think of Jesus' Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40). Simple.

Rainer and Geiger did research among 400 evangelical churches and found that simple churches tend to be vibrant and growing, while complex churches tend to be stuck in the same place. They defined a simple church as "a congregation designed around a straight-forward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth." They write: "It appeared there was a relationship between being simple and being effective." Apparently, you can be busy and most people will be happy, but that doesn't mean spiritual transformation is happening.

The book is, appropriately, a simple read. It names four main characteristics of simple churches, tells you how to develop them, and gives plenty of supporting anecdotes from all sizes of churches. Here are the four character traits of a simple church.

■ **CLARITY**—Start with a ministry blueprint. Can people in your ministry understand and communicate what you're trying to accomplish together? Most churches have vision statements, but Rainer and Geiger found that very few church leaders could recite or explain them. Instead, there tends to be a crazy quilt of the past decades' coolest ideas, which are often at odds with one another. "Simple churches have a crystal clear process. They work hard to ensure everyone grasps it."

■ **MOVEMENT**—Build bridges to a person's next

step. If someone starts out in your worship service or Sunday night youth program, how easy is it for that person to move to a deeper level of commitment to Christ? We need a plan, not only for our various programs but also for helping someone take their next natural step. "Movement is what happens *between* the programs."

■ **ALIGNMENT**—Row in the same direction. Is your church a buffet of disconnected ministries, or is there a unified approach by staff and lay leaders? A dozen intelligent, God-loving leaders, passionate about their own ministry, can cause tremendous damage to a church if they're not part of an overarching process. "Alignment is the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process."

■ **FOCUS**—Say no to everything else. There was a time when you had big dreams about drawing kids closer to Christ—are they now buried under a pile of special events and activities? Once we have clarity and alignment about what really matters, we have to get rid of the clutter and avoid it in the future. "Focus is the commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process."

The book has a chapter called "Becoming Simple," with step-by-step instructions. What influence can a youth leader have? Rainer and Geiger recommend that you present the concepts to your pastor. Ask for permission to implement a simple plan for your own ministry, making sure your pastor understands the concepts and the likely push-back you could receive. Who knows? Success in one area of the church could spark interest in other areas. ■