

The Complex Work of the Simple Church

During a [recent podcast conversation](#) with Doug Paul, one of the Pastors at East End Fellowship in Richmond, VA, the idea of keeping programming simplified came up. In this [My Ministry Breakthrough episode](#), Doug talks about the strategy of developing and discipling people at his church. One stark realization came up: **strategy takes more than three words on your website.**

Every week I meet another church or pastor for whom their idea of simplicity, often inspired by the book [Simple Church](#), resulted in simply organizing their website menus around three keywords. “Simple Church” ministry demands more than picking three words to put on your marketing pieces. True simplicity requires a conviction in a calling, courage to assess, confidence in a team and competency to lead forward. In most cases, the mountain of simplicity feels too steep to climb, so we turn around.

Here is why: **it is a simple thing to maintain complexity, but it is a complex thing to maintain simplicity.**

You really have to do nothing to keep a complex ministry calendar and confusing process of assimilation and growth. But to really become simple, you have some complex work that must be done. Hard conversations with people who love Jesus must be had. Stringent assessments of what effectiveness in disciple-making really looks like must be completed. Challenging seasons of sunseting ministries that were once vital to the life of your church must be navigated.

For many of us, it is easier to fight the fires of week-to-week ministry and hope that those three strategic words we crafted will eventually work their magic. As a result, you keep doing what you’ve always done and then expect different results.

Here are 23 things you are probably still doing even though you read [Simple Church](#):

- 1.

Still doing too much yourself without developing anyone else

2. Still missing a clear path for spiritual development that is easy enough to draw on a napkin
3. Still running on the assimilation class hamster wheel never really getting anywhere
4. Still propping the back door open and wondering why unconnected people are walking out
5. Still elevating participation above transformation because you're just counting heads
6. Still sustaining ministries that no longer contribute to your mission
7. Still tiptoeing around sensitive leaders who confuse passion for purpose
8. Still running events out of nostalgia, not conviction
9. Still pleading for volunteers instead of developing leaders
10. Still closing classrooms and blaming youth sports
11. Still circling the wagons of theology instead of living the gospel in your neighborhood
12. Still thinking that lots of activity must mean you're doing a good job
13. Still asking for more money to do the same things and get the same results
14. Still building ministry calendars as if there are families out there just hoping for more to do
15. Still programming as if the church were the center of life and community

16. Still consuming members' schedules with on-campus activity instead of giving them time to know their neighbors
17. Still chasing past programming success instead of charting future gospel influence
18. Still starting new, exciting initiatives without stopping existing, obligatory activity
19. Still putting words on a wall one day and thinking that people know or care what they mean the next
20. Still approaching discipleship in terms of products, instead of process
21. Still trying to get somewhere with your mission without giving anyone a map of where they're going
22. Still running ministry that feels random instead of growing people in rhythm
23. Still announcing every possibility of church connection instead of one next step into community

Developing a clear, and simple, ministry strategy may be vital, but strategy represents **only 20% of vision clarity**. If you have not also developed a shared understanding of the marks of a disciple in your context, the next steps will never be enough.

[Find out more about what a fully-formed framework of **real church growth** looks like through Auxano's Vision Framing process.](#)

> [Read more from Bryan here.](#)

