



*Deliberate Simplicity*

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keep it simple



## SIMPLIFY

Before Steve Mason agreed to pastor County Christian Center in Laurel, Washington, he had a few stipulations. He made the group of fifty adults commit that the church would focus its energies on three things, and three things only. He asked them to agree that the church would focus on

1. worship
2. small groups
3. outreach

Perhaps out of desperation, the people agreed. Steve wrote up the agreement and had everyone sign it. He moved to Laurel in 1989 to begin his ministry around these three things, and the rest, as they say, is history. County Christian Center would later change its name to Christ the King Community Church, but it never changed its commitment to those three priorities.

Early on, as Steve tells it, those priorities were tested. Various people approached him to ask if the church could get involved in other projects, have other points of emphasis, or initiate other

programs. Some were wistful, wishing that the church would reinvent its past. But for the first year Steve did something very strategic: he carried in his pocket the church's written agreement. When discussion would come up about other programs or ministries, Steve would slowly pull the paper out of his pocket and say, "No, these are the things that we agreed upon, worship, small groups, and outreach." The paper in the pocket was an early expression of Deliberate Simplicity that set a course for what CTK would later become.

Many how-to books for church leaders suggest things for the leaders to do (in addition to what they're already doing) to improve the effectiveness of their church. Unfortunately, many pastors are already experiencing diminishing returns (or burnout) from attempting too much. They are trapped in an old paradigm that says, "The only way to increase your productivity is to work harder or longer." But pastors know intuitively that adding more to the list only accelerates their fatigue and demise. Only "super pastors" with extraordinary capacity for administration flourish in such a system. The Clark Kent pastors are burdened, if not overwhelmed, by the complexity. Many are working to the point of exhaustion in an attempt to keep up.

Church participants are also burdened by complexity. The time requirements for many church programs are intense. Added to family, work, and school obligations, the demands can seem unrealistic. Some have even told me they had quit going to church because they didn't have the time. Something is wrong with this picture, and it's not with the people. It's with the system the people are in. As Pastor Wade Hodges opines, "If becoming a part of a church places people in an environment that encourages them to live more frenetic lives than they were living before, then we are going about doing church the wrong way."


Church researcher Kennon Callahan reports,

People in our time bring with them to congregations the search for help, hope, and home. They are already busy

## MINIMALITY

and bustling enough in their everyday, ordinary lives. They neither need nor want the mixed blessing of a church that now invites them to be even more busy and bustling than they already are. . . . People are not looking for a congregation that is trying to do too much too soon. They intuitively know that such a congregation only contributes to their trying to do too much too soon in their own lives. They look for a healthier future than that. People are not looking for a congregation that is going to be something for everyone. Most of us have tried to be something for everyone and have discovered that it does not work. People have the wisdom to know that it does not work for congregations either.<sup>4</sup>

*When Callahan says that people are searching for help, hope, and home, is he missing anything?*



Deliberate Simplicity advocates restricting the activities of the church instead of expanding them. It calls for less programming instead of more . . . working smarter instead of harder. It says, “It’s not about the hours you put in; it’s about what you put into those hours.” It calls us to move the fulcrum so the same (or less) energy is leveraged for greater results. Minimality is how less turns out to be more.

**min•i•mal** *adj*: smallest possible in amount or least in extent

A friend of mine owns a steel fabrication company with his father. The shop next to theirs has a machine that cuts steel with a

jet of water! Powerfully pressurized. Intensely focused. But still just plain ol' H<sub>2</sub>O. It is amazing what common elements can do when they are focused well. In a Deliberately Simple church, “deliberate” is the pressure in the hose. “Simple” is what brings powerful definition to the flow.

The elements that compose Christ the King Community Church are really quite common. For instance, we have an emphasis on small groups. This is not new with us. Christians have met in small groups since the first century. We did not invent the small group concept. But we have clarified that this is how we’re going to do it. We’ve made small groups a point of emphasis and accountability. It’s the focus of Deliberate Simplicity that gives it power. In his book *Selling the Invisible*, Howard Beckwith writes, “In our increasingly complex world, nothing works more powerfully than simplicity.”

Focusing is about making choices, and that means deciding what to leave out as well as what to leave in. As Howard Hendricks says, “The secret of concentration is elimination.” Eric Garland puts it this way: “The real work isn’t acquisition. It’s good, reliable filtering.” The development of the immensely popular BlackBerry wireless device by Research In Motion (RIM) is a good illustration.

Building the BlackBerry meant rejecting some of the computing world’s most basic tenets. Even today, no one at RIM would argue that wireless devices are about to eclipse the personal computer. But RIM’s employees know from hard-won experience that PC strategies can’t compete in a post-PC world.

A case in point: the computer industry’s addiction to Moore’s Law, the proposition that the number of transistors on a computer chip doubles every 18 months or so. The inevitable result of ever-increasing hardware power is that software writers feel comfortable developing ever-more-complex code—and that’s not always a good thing. “In the PC world, you have less engineering discipline

on the application end, because you know that next year you'll have more memory, a faster processor, and an infinite power supply," says Lazardis. "In wireless, you can't get away with that. Wireless is inherently constrained in terms of memory, power and bandwidth. We develop from scarcity, so we have to be disciplined."

Right from the start, Lazardis believed that what would matter most to the BlackBerry's long-term success was not what RIM put into the device but what it left out. Only by eliminating certain features could engineers extend the life of its power source—a single AAA battery—to three weeks. Only by leaving stuff out could they successfully launch an email message from a two-watt transmitter.<sup>5</sup>

Like RIM, other companies, such as Apple, are finding that less can be more. Why do the users of the iPod enjoy the experience? According to Jonathan Ivie, the VP for Industrial Design, "It's all about removing the unnecessary."

*Do you think the limitations of a wireless device are an appropriate analogy for the church? Why or why not?*



Does the development of a handheld device have application to the church? At first I thought no, because my mind ran immediately to God as our power source. He is infinitely powerful. But on further reflection, I realized that while it does not have application to God, it does have application to *us*. We are finite. We have a limited amount of time and energy. In a sense, we are trying to

achieve a high calling on a triple-A battery. We need the discipline of intelligent loss to achieve our purpose. We need to keep asking, “What is the simplest thing that could possibly work?” and jettison other elements even if they have traditionally been associated with progress.

The feature-list wars are not good for technology or church ministry. While adding features gives a list more boxes to check, the features create bulk and may even cloud the real needs of the consumer. What Christians really need is just a simple set of beliefs and practices.

## DOCTRINAL MINIMALISTS

As a Deliberately Simple church, we are focused on a core set of beliefs instead of debating theological minutiae and denominational distinctives. We are doctrinal minimalists, in the tradition of Augustine, who said, “In essential matters, unity. In non-essential matters, diversity. In all matters, charity.”

People from every conceivable church background—Anglican, Assembly of God, Baptist, Brethren, Calvary Chapel, Catholic, Christian Reformed, Covenant, Episcopalian, Evangelical Free, Foursquare, Lutheran, Methodist, Mennonite, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Reformed, Vineyard—have found a home at Christ the King. One of the reasons why CTK can be common ground for people from so many different backgrounds is that we are doctrinal minimalists. Our degree of dogmatism rises and falls with the degree of clarity in Scripture. Where there is more clarity in Scripture, we are more dogmatic. Where there is less clarity in Scripture, we are less dogmatic. We have found that what unites us is far more important than what divides us. In the words of Clay Crosse, “It all comes down to a man dying on a cross, saving the world.”

### *Major on the Majors*

At CTK we have determined that the essential matters are summarized in these four statements: