Focus

What will we say no to, so we can say yes to the path?

> *"Focus is the commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process."*
>
> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church*

What Rainer and Geiger mean

The authors call focus the hardest of the four, and most church leaders would agree. Complexity creeps in because adding is easy and subtracting is painful. Every new program has a champion; nobody campaigns to end one. Focus means letting go of what falls outside the path, being slow to add, and being honest about events that pull people's time and energy away from the steps that form them. It means saying no to good things so there's room for the best ones.

Where Pathway stands

We're a church of around a hundred people with eight or so regular weekly or monthly gatherings, children's ministry on Sundays, a dozen or so serving teams and seasonal events such as the Feast of Thankfulness, Operation Christmas Child and Christmas Eve. Much of it rests on the same faithful people. That kind of faithfulness is a gift, and it's also how good people burn out.

A fair caution about the book: Rainer and Geiger mostly studied larger churches with staff. A church our size may already be fairly simple in some ways. For us, focus may turn out to be less about cutting programs and more about connecting the ones we have and protecting our people's time.

What focus could look like here

1. **Take an honest inventory first.** In fall 2027, list every gathering, event and team with three facts: which step it serves, about how many people it reaches, and about how many volunteer hours it takes. Put the list in front of the LBA. The first round is a conversation, not a set of cuts.
2. **Give each item one of three answers.** Keep it and sharpen it. Fold it into something else. Or let it end well, with public thanks and a celebration of what God did through it.
3. **Adopt a rule for adding.** No new ongoing ministry starts until its champion can name the step it serves, the person who'll lead it, and what it replaces on the calendar or in the volunteer pool.
4. **Test special events against the path.** An event earns its place when it moves people somewhere, such as a meal that leads guests into a group or a service project that turns into a serving team. Plan the next step before the event, not after.

5. **Let the budget follow the path.** Pathway's fiscal year starts June 1. Build the 2028–29 budget, written in spring 2028, around the path, and show the church how the money lines up with it.

6. **Apply focus to the pastor's calendar too.** Look honestly at what the pastor carries (chairing the LBA, recruiting, data entry, outreach and more) and hand off what others can do well, so preaching, prayer and leader development get his best hours.

A POSSIBLE TIMELINE

Sept–Oct 2027	Inventory of every gathering, event and team.
Dec 2027	The LBA's quarterly review discusses the inventory; no cuts yet.
Spring 2028	Decisions on keep, fold or end; the 2028–29 budget is built around the path.
June 4, 2028	Vision Sunday: we tell the church what we've focused and why.

WATCH FOR

- **Focus can wound.** Ending something a person has given twenty years to is a real loss. Talk with the people involved first, grieve with them, thank them publicly and go slowly.
- **Things that run under every step.** Prayer, Scripture, the Lord's Supper and worship don't belong to one step; they feed all of them. Don't force them into a single box, and don't measure them as programs.
- **A smaller calendar with nothing in its place.** The point of focus is to free people for their families, their neighbors and our five towns. If we cut things and nobody's freed for anything, we've only made church smaller.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. What's one good thing at Pathway that may be crowding out something better?
2. Who carries the most weight in our calendar right now? What would help them?
3. When Pathway has ended something in the past, what did we do well, and what would we do differently?

Source: Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2006).