Clarity

Can our people say how Pathway helps a person grow?

> *"Clarity is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people."*
>
> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church*

What Rainer and Geiger mean

The authors aren't talking about a slogan. They mean a **process**: the route a church expects a person to travel, from a first Sunday toward maturity in Christ. Clarity means the people in the chairs can describe that route, and not only the pastor and the board. In their study of about 400 churches, the healthy, growing ones had a process ordinary members could explain. Many of the others had one too, but it lived in a binder or in the pastor's head.

Clarity comes first because the other three depend on it. People can't take a next step they can't see, and leaders can't line up ministries or let programs go against a path nobody can name.

Where Pathway stands

We already have four words that were written as a path: Learn, Love, Live and Lead the Way of Jesus. The website explains each one, and the Love paragraph says learning "is only the first step." So the bones are there. But most of us say the words in a different order (LIVE, LEARN, LOVE, LEAD), few people could tell you which ministry belongs to which word, and the words rarely come up on a Sunday morning. By the book's measure, we have a process on paper that hasn't yet become clear to the people.

Here's a fair test. If someone stopped you in the parking lot and asked, "How does Pathway help a person grow?", what would you say? If ten of us would give ten different answers, we have work to do.

What clarity could look like here

1. **Settle the words, then keep them still.** Session 3 and the town halls will decide whether we keep, reshape or retire the four words. Whatever we land on, pick one order and never vary it. If the words describe a path, the order is part of what they mean.
2. **Draw it once and use the same picture everywhere.** A church called Pathway has an obvious image: a trail with a marker for each step. Use it on the website, the bulletin, the slides, the new members class and a wall in the Ebenezer Center.
3. **Put it in one sentence a fourth grader can repeat.** If Hikers can say it, adults will remember it. Test drafts on a few kids before we adopt them.

4. **Teach it to leaders before we teach it to the church.** Every LBA member and ministry leader should be able to explain the path, and say where their ministry fits, before Vision Sunday.
5. **Say it on ordinary Sundays.** Name the step when we announce something ("Band of Brothers is a great next step if you're ready to Love"), close sermons with a next step tied to the path, and give the bulletin and the newsletter a regular "your next step" line.
6. **Check whether it's sticking.** Clarity is measured in people, not in printed pieces. Each quarter, a few LBA members ask five people at random to name the path, and we add the question to the surveys we retake in spring 2028.

A POSSIBLE TIMELINE

Feb 7–20, 2027	Session 3: the Vision Team works on mission and our path.
Mar–Apr 2027	Town halls and Life Groups weigh in on the four words.
May 2027	Draft wording goes to the church for comment; the LBA decides.
June 20, 2027	The "our path" sermon in the June series.
Summer 2027	The picture and sentence go on the website, bulletin, slides and walls.
Sept, Dec, Mar	The LBA's quarterly check: can people name the path?
Spring 2028	Survey retake includes the clarity question.

WATCH FOR

- **Clarity drifting into marketing.** A good graphic doesn't make disciples. If the words describe something we don't actually do, people learn to tune them out, and that's worse than having no words.
- **A process mistaken for sanctification.** *Simple Church* is a book about structure. Growth in holiness is the Spirit's work, and He works through the means of grace: Scripture, prayer, the Lord's Supper, worship and Christian fellowship. A clear process gives those means a clear place in our week. It can't do the Spirit's work for Him.
- **Changing the words too often.** Every new version resets what people remember. Once we adopt the words, plan on keeping them for years.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Without looking, write Pathway's four words in order. Compare with the person next to you. Did you match?
2. Which ministry do you think belongs with each word? Where did you hesitate?
3. What would a guest need to hear in their first three Sundays to understand how Pathway helps people grow?

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

Movement

Does every step lead somewhere?

> "*Movement is the sequential steps in the process that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment.*"
>
> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church*

What Rainer and Geiger mean

A clear path still has to lead somewhere. Movement means each ministry sits at a particular place along the path and points people toward the next one, so that over time a person goes from the edges of church life toward deeper commitment to Christ and His people. The authors stress deliberate **move points**: easy, intentional handoffs from one step to the next, such as a short-term group that feeds an ongoing one, or a sermon that closes with a specific next step.

In a complicated church, people stay busy without going anywhere. Programs sit side by side, each asking for the same people's time, and nobody is sure what's supposed to come after what.

Where Pathway stands

For a church of around a hundred people, our week is full: Sunday worship, the Into the World Adult Life Group, Monday and Thursday night Bible studies, Band of Brothers, Wesleyan Women, the Midweek Prayer Group, Navigators and a dozen or so serving teams. Most of these are good, and some are thriving. But they sit side by side. A guest who loves Sunday morning isn't shown which one comes next, and the main way in is a sign-up sheet at the Welcome Center or "see Pastor Bart." We're only now building a new members class.

A first try at the map

For discussion only. This uses the four words as the website orders them. Your table may sort things differently, and the disagreements are worth talking about.

LEARN	LOVE	LIVE	LEAD
Sunday worship and the sermon; study guides; RightNow Media; Hikers	Life Groups and Bible studies; Band of Brothers; Wesleyan Women; Midweek Prayer; Navigators	Serving teams; missions; Operation Christmas Child; neighbors in our five towns	Leading a group or team; teaching; mentoring an apprentice; the LBA
Move point: a next-step card and a short-term group	*Move point:* serve together as a group	*Move point:* an invitation to apprentice	*Move point:* reproduce, raising up the next leader

What movement could look like here

1. **Place every ministry on the path.** Each ministry leader names the step their ministry serves and the step it points to. The leader's guide has a one-page template for this, due September 30, 2027.
2. **Build a move point from Sunday into a group.** After each sermon series, offer a four-to-six-week group built on that series' study guide, on a Sunday or a weeknight, with the goal of handing people on to an ongoing group. Put a next-step card in the bulletin and at the Welcome Center.
3. **Build a move point from a group into serving.** Ask each Life Group to serve together once a quarter: a missions project, a funeral luncheon, the Feast of Thankfulness. People who try serving alongside friends are more likely to keep at it.
4. **Build a move point from serving into leading.** Ask every team and group leader to name an apprentice by the end of 2027. Leaders who never hand anything off become a ceiling.
5. **Give guests a clear first 90 days.** First Impressions follows up after a first visit, a short-term group invitation follows within a month, and the new members class (planned for learn.pathwaywes.com) explains the path.
6. **Count movement as well as attendance.** Gather already tracks who is in a group and who serves. Each quarter the LBA can watch two numbers: the share of Sunday adults in a group and the share who serve.

WATCH FOR

- **People aren't on a conveyor belt.** Spiritual growth rarely runs in a straight line. God meets people out of sequence, and a longtime saint in a season of grief or illness may need rest, not a next step. The path describes the usual way people grow here. It isn't a test anyone has to pass.
- **More commitment can mean fewer nights at church.** Movement aims at deeper love for Christ and neighbor. For some people the faithful next step is to serve a neighbor or lead their family, which never shows up on our calendar.
- **Hidden steps.** Sometimes the real move point is a person: the friend who sat with someone on their first Sunday. Programs help, but relationships do most of the moving.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Think of someone who has grown a lot at Pathway in the last few years. What moved them?
2. Where do people get stuck between Sunday morning and a group? Why?
3. Which of our ministries clearly points to a next step? Which one doesn't point anywhere yet?

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

Alignment

Are all our ministries walking the same path?

> *"Alignment is the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process."*
>
> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church*

What Rainer and Geiger mean

Alignment means every ministry, from the nursery to the adult groups, uses the same path, so a family hears one way of growing instead of five. It also means leaders measure success by the whole process, not only by their own ministry's numbers. In a misaligned church, ministries compete for the same people, nights, volunteers and dollars, and each one quietly builds its own little church. The book's examples come mostly from churches with paid staff. At Pathway, alignment is mostly about volunteer ministry leaders and the Local Board of Administration (LBA).

Where Pathway stands

We have real strengths here. Pathway Trailblazers already uses trail language (Crawlers, Hikers, Navigators), which fits a church called Pathway and a path picture well. But our adult groups began at different times for different good reasons, each with its own pattern. Serving teams recruit separately from separate sign-up sheets. The bulletin, the newsletter, the website, the slides and the podcast all carry information, and nothing yet ties them to a common path. And the LBA mostly makes calendar and budget decisions one at a time, without a shared filter.

What alignment could look like here

1. **Start with the LBA.** When the board adopts the path, it also agrees to use it. Any request that comes to the board for money or a date answers one question first: which step of our path does this serve?
2. **Gather the ministry leaders twice a year.** A leaders' evening each August and January to pray, tell stories of people moving along the path, and plan the calendar together, so ministries don't collide.
3. **Write a one-page fit for every ministry.** The leader's guide template asks three things: which step this ministry serves, which step it points people toward, and what it might stop doing to serve the path better. Due September 30, 2027.
4. **Bring kids and youth onto the same path.** Andrea Smith and the Trailblazers team translate the four words for children and teens, so families hear one path at home, at church and in the car.

5. **Align our communication.** Tag every bulletin and newsletter item with its step. Build the "Our path" page on the website after Vision Sunday. Use the same picture and words on every channel.
6. **Recruit by the path.** Replace a dozen separate sign-up sheets with one "find your next step" form (a Custom Form on the website) that routes people to the right leader.
7. **Train every new leader in the path.** Add a short lesson to the volunteer training planned for learn.pathwaywes.com, so a new group or team leader learns the path along with the practical details.

A POSSIBLE TIMELINE

May 2027	The LBA adopts the path and the question it will ask of requests.
Aug 2027	First leaders' evening.
Sept 30, 2027	One-page fits are due from every ministry.
Fall 2027	Combined next-step form on the website; communication tagged by step.
Jan 2028	Second leaders' evening; the LBA reviews the fits.

WATCH FOR

- **Alignment confused with uniformity.** Band of Brothers and Wesleyan Women shouldn't become the same group. They should point in the same direction.
- **More meetings.** Done well, alignment lightens the load on volunteers because fewer requests compete for them. If it only adds meetings, we've missed it.
- **Forgetting who started things.** Many of our ministries exist because someone saw a need and acted. Aligning a ministry should honor that faithfulness and invite those founders into the conversation early.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Where do two of our ministries compete for the same people, night or volunteers?
2. If a family attends worship, Trailblazers and a Life Group, do they hear one path or several?
3. What would make the one-page fit feel helpful to a ministry leader instead of like paperwork?

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

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).