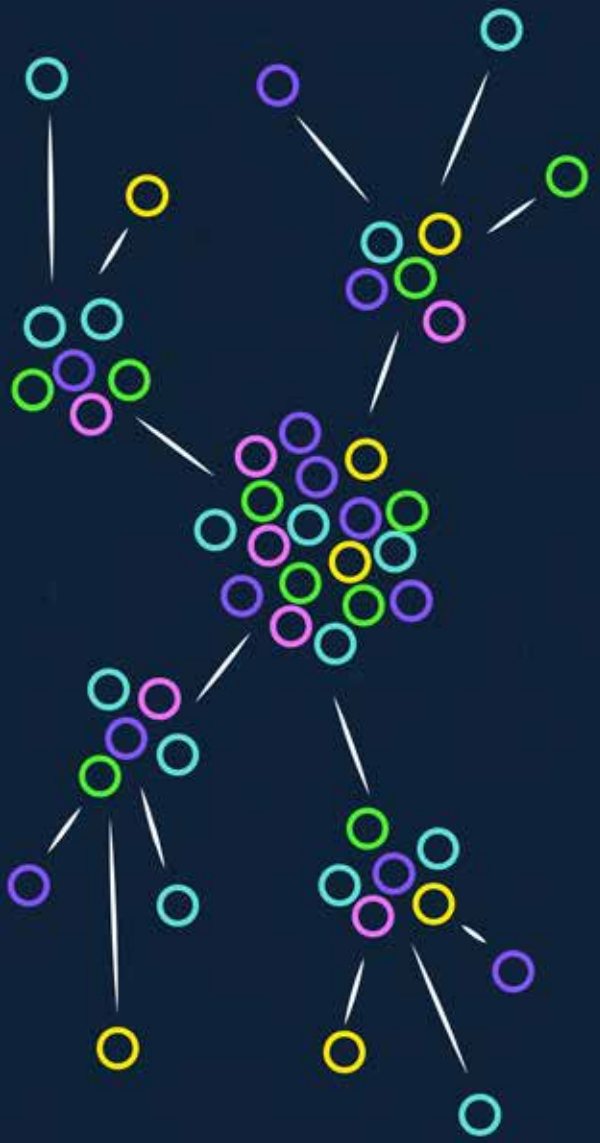
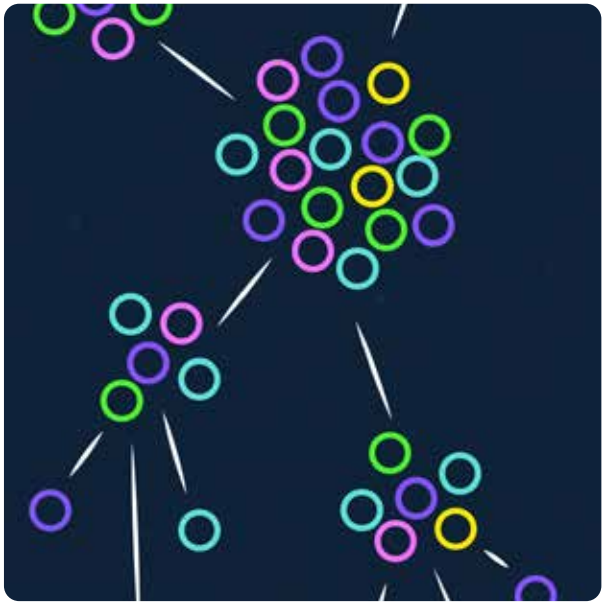


Illustration by Oli Winward

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What is a simple church?

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Our first value, **gospel-centred**, answers the question, '*why* do you do what you do as a church?' Our second value, **disciple-making**, answers the question, '*what* do you do as a church?' And our third value, **simple**, answers the question, '*how* do you do what you do as a church?' Answer: our strategy to make disciples of Jesus is to be a simple church. This leaflet is about what we mean by 'simple church', and why.

We can't control how living things grow, but we can help (or hinder)

The church is God's Spirit-filled community; it is a living organism. It is vital to realise that we don't and can't make the church grow — God does. In the same way, a farmer can't make crops grow — God gives growth. But, like the farmer, we can help or hinder that growth.

Living things — like plants or children — need enough structure to give direction, support, and protection. But too much will stifle and exhaust them. There needs to be the right 'space' for life to happen and do its thing. In the same way, churches need structures to give direction and support. But too many programmes and structures can leave a church exhausted and stifled. There needs to be 'space' in the way a church is structured for real life to happen. So much of true discipleship happens as God works in the midst of our messy lives. Note how in Acts 2.42-47 we see the early church devoted to just a few things: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. And, right alongside that, we read that 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'. We don't make the growth — God does. Our job is to focus on the key things.

Bible within community

Discipleship happens by the word of God, and in the context of Christian community. And both of these take space. I cannot reflect and feed deeply upon the Scriptures when I am overwhelmed with activity. And I cannot share life so that I am truly known by my church family when my schedule is full of church meetings. So we have to find a way to structure church life so that both word and community can thrive.

Simple but not simplistic

Since the church is made up of people, relationships, and real life, it is complex. But something can be simple at the same time as complex. In fact, simple structures are usually the best way to manage complex interrelationships. Ironically, it is when churches allow themselves to become over-complicated that they can also become simplistic; when time pressure from different demands and programmes starts to escalate, space for thought, reflection, and relationships diminishes, leading to simplistic teaching and superficial relationships.

Being a simple church means that we focus first on people, not programmes

We aren't against programmes, but we want to ensure that we are focusing on things that enable people to grow as disciples – rather than programmes for the sake of activity. The structures need to serve disciple-making. We have three 'load-bearing walls' at GCG: Sunday gathered worship, Community Groups, and leadership training. Everything else we do is like furniture which can be moved around, or ditched altogether: it isn't necessarily here to stay. As far as possible, as we grow and develop as a church, we will integrate new aspects into these structures (rather than adding new programmes 'on top').

The circulation system in the body gives a helpful picture of our simple church. The heart is like our Sunday gathering, the central pump that gives energy and direction to everything else. The arteries are like Community Groups, scattered around different parts of Tyneside, giving life to a particular community. The capillaries are like our individual lives. Each capillary supplies oxygen to individual cells in the body: they are the 'front line'; the heart on its own would be useless. In the same way, there are people in my network, family, street, work, and so on, whom I am uniquely able to share life with and share the gospel with. I am supported by my Community Group and on mission with my whole church.

Thus, in a simple church, '*our* mission' is also '*my* mission'.

Simple is scalable and flexible

One great quality of simple things is that they are scalable: you can build things with them. They are also more robust, since with fewer moving parts there is less that can break. And because community is central, we are innately flexible to different people and communities: a Community Group with lots of young families in it will look different to a Community Group with lots of asylum seekers in it. In this way, a simple church can accommodate people without commoditising them (which can be a trap for churches trying to 'fit' people into the right programme). We believe that a simple church enables and promotes true disciple-making.

