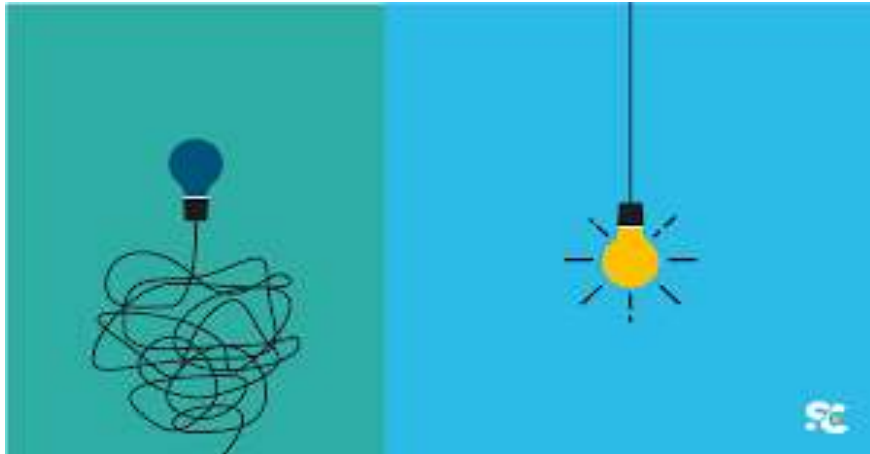


K.I.S.S. or K.I.C.K.?

By John Gagliardi



We all know the acronym **K.I.S.S.** (in polite company, “**Keep It Sweet and Simple**, and in not-so-polite company, **Keep It Simple, Stupid!**) ... great advice in our complicated and convoluted modern world. And like all the best advice, if you look long enough you will find it somewhere in the Bible (well, maybe not the “stupid” bit).

I was reading Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians in the Message Bible a couple of days ago, and I came across exactly this advice – just keep it simple! Paul, himself a highly educated and sophisticated man, had learned the lesson of simplifying his life, so that he was able to focus all his energy and power on only the things that really mattered.

He was writing to the Corinthians, a people who were well known for complicating things, and turning the simplicity of the Christian life into a knotted ball of complexity. Rather than living by the K.I.S.S. principle, they leaned much more towards the **K.I.C.K.** principle – “**Keep It Complicated, Knucklehead!**).

In verses 29 to 32, Paul’s admonition to the rebellious and undisciplined Corinthians was this: “...Don’t complicate your lives unnecessarily. **KEEP IT SIMPLE** – in marriage, grief, joy, whatever. Even in ordinary things – your daily routines of shopping, and so on ... I want you to live as free of complications as possible.”

Humankind has always had the propensity to complicate simple things – and Christians are no exceptions. Over two thousand years, Christians have turned the beautiful simplicity of the messages Jesus preached into a complex set of traditions, liturgical rules and philosophical musings.

Paul cut to the core when he told the Corinthians: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2: 2). He was concerned that the unruly and fickle Corinthians would be deceived by the devil, so that their minds would be “corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11: 3).

Here the word translated as “simplicity” is the Greek word “haplotes”, which means “single”. Paul is saying that we must be single-minded in our faith. He says: “This **one thing** I do ... I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”

(Philippians 3: 13 and 14); and James warns that if we are “double-minded”, we will receive nothing from Christ (James 1: 7 and 8).

Although anything but a naïve and gullible man, Paul knew only too well the dangers of over-complicating a simple and powerful message. Jesus was God, yet told simple stories in simple language – He wanted to be understood, not spark abstract debates with his listeners.

Paul explained it like this to the Galatians: “For my part, I am going to boast about nothing but the Cross of our Master, Jesus Christ. Because of that Cross, I have been crucified in relation to the world, set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others, and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate ... Quite frankly, I don’t want to be bothered by these disputes. I have far more important things to do – the serious living of this faith” (Galatians 6: 14-17).

Ray Stedman in a recent daily devotion, “*The Power of His Presence*”, put it this way: “Christianity is not a creed – it is a relationship. It is living with a Person. That is the simplicity that is in Christ. The danger that we constantly face is that we get involved in the things *about* Christ, and fail to live in a relationship *with* Christ.

“You can lose it in the midst of Christian activity. You can lose it when you get so involved in some of the fascinating aspects of Scripture that you lose the ‘simplicity that is in Christ’. You can lose it in the pressures of daily living. You can get so busy and so worried and so anxious about yourself and the things that are happening to you, that you lose the sense that Christ is with you, and He is adequate. This is the beautiful ‘simplicity that is in Jesus’.”

In the workaday world, which is high-pressured and even chaotic, it is sometimes hard to find a way to put Christ first, and push our “stuff:” into the background. Simplicity “guru” Elaine St James, in a recent *Fast Company* “blog” (mwarshaw@fastcompany.com) gave this advice:

- It takes time to make time – maintaining a complicated life is a great way to avoid changing it
- You can’t lead a simple life if you can’t say NO – no one can maintain more than three priorities ... it’s hard at first, but the more you say NO, the easier it gets – figure out what your priorities are, and say NO to the rest
- Possessions are nine-tenths of the problem – because we have all this “stuff”, we work longer to pay for it, which leaves less time to enjoy what we worked so hard to buy. And “stuff” doesn’t just cost money – it also takes up time for all that installing, fixing, maintaining, listening and watching. And what does everyone say they *really* want? More time! The irony is so profound.
- What really matters is ... what *really* matters! If you’ve spent years not knowing what you want to do ... it can seem like an impossible challenge to figure it out. For many people, it is easier to keep doing what they know they *don’t* want to do, or don’t mind doing. Simplifying your life frees up time for you to figure out what *really* matters.

Ms St James was not coming at this from a Christian perspective, but what she says is true and profound – we need to stop and take a deep breath, and work out what really – *really* – matters in our life. And for Christians this does not need to be hard. We have great teachers like the Apostle Paul to tell us unambiguously that we need only know “Christ, and Him crucified”.

Once we have that profound yet simple truth planted and rooted in our being, the rest follows. Bill Parker in *The Simplicity of Christ*: “What is this simplicity? It is salvation, from regeneration

to glorification, conditioned solely upon Christ and His righteousness imputed ...Our doctrine, our practices, our methods should aim towards this simplicity, so that we continually say, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Galatians 6: 14).

Benjamin Franklin understood the importance of simplicity: "This we have shown, by many infallible proofs that the way to God is plain – so plain, so simple, so easily understood, that no one need err. All truth in religion lies within the Bible. When it is our guide in religious matters, we are sure of being right, and need not err. It is our creed to be believed, our chart to guide our lives. It contains the assurance of pardon, justification, sanctification and redemption. In the end, the promise of a glorious resurrection and life eternal beyond the grave."

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Bethlehem Forward Movement Mission): "As life in general becomes more and more complex, so religions tends to be affected in the same way. It seems to be assumed that if the affairs of men are so difficult and complicated, the affairs of God should be still more complicated ... Hence there comes a tendency to increase ceremony and ritual, and to multiply organizations and activities ... The fact is, that as we get further away from God, life becomes more complicated and involved. We see this not only in the Bible but in subsequent history ... the truly religious life is always the simple life.

"Men and women, is Jesus Christ and Him crucified everything to you? This is the question. It is a personal matter – is He central? Does He come before anything and everything? Do you pin your faith in Him and in Him alone? Nothing else works. He works!"

***E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme
And shall be till I die.***