

WHISPERS OF GOD

Simple Complexity

So here's a quote from famed scholar, physician, poet and humorist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. I ran across that really got me thinking:

I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.

Wow. Woah. Hmm . . . what readily comes to my mind... and/or heart... and/or soul... and/or spirit . . . is a little epistemology and existentialism; generous portions of theology and rationalism; spicy sprinkles of philosophy, sociology, relativism, pragmatism, and reductionism (think Occam's razor); dashes of hermeneutics, exegesis, eisegesis, cognitive biases, logical fallacies – okay, wait -- my head is already spinning. Let's start over.

Uh, once upon a time, back when I was a small boy, my mom and dad taught me how to cross a busy street. Simple task, I thought. Just step off the curb and walk straight. Okay. Great. See you at the hospital.

So that is simplicity on the front side of complexity. I had no idea how complex it actually is to cross a street . . .

Look BOTH ways before you cross, not just one way. But that's not all. Then look down for puddles, potholes, gutters, etc. And look up for traffic lights, signage and pedestrian signals that are there for a reason. And look for speeding bikes in the bike lane (I almost got hit twice in Amsterdam). And walk, don't ride your bike across the street. And don't jaywalk, use the marked walkways. And watch for cars zipping through center turn lanes. I didn't do those last three things when I was 12, hit a moving vehicle with my bike, and was thrown across the road! Not good.

At this point, it may be tempting to adopt a seemingly simple solution: "Gee, then let's just not walk across any street if it's going to be this risky – let's *drive*."

Oh, so now you want to drive a high speed vehicle across those streets, eh? Now we're really going to see what complexity looks like! But not here. Get your own driver's handbook. No simplicity there either.

So, where's the simplicity on the far side of complexity in dealing with life's perpetual issues, challenges, and crossroads? At the risk of falling prey to a bit of reductionism myself, I'd like to crystallize my answer to that question with one word: humility.

Humility readily admits:

None of us have all the answers.
None of us understands all things fully.
None of us see every hidden factor.
None of us swim through all the layers.
None of us really have the bottom line.
None of us have a handle on life.
None of us are all-knowing. Only God is.



Good news, right? Just breathe it in. Let Him in. *Be still and know that I am God.* Walk a little slower. Ask a few more questions. Be gracious with those who see and do things differently. Be a team player. Be grateful for tips along the way. Laugh when you mess up. Just say "whoops" when someone else messes up. Smile when you offer suggestions. Be secure enough to say; "I don't know."

This makes us a lifelong learner.

Someone who is easy to talk to.

A friend with a heart full of compassion.

A fellow traveler who loves to help others.

A pleasant soul who listens for His whispers.

Simplicity on the front side of complexity is most often naïve, insecure, hasty, and one-dimensional – looking only one way before crossing a busy street, yet still making confident assertions. Like the Pharisees. Very dangerous and hurtful.

Simplicity on the far side of complexity humbly sees the layers of complexity but can still keep walking... with simple help... simple trust... simple gratefulness... simple patience... simple kindness... and simple love.

For you see, true wisdom unfolds a layer or two at a time, and it is not always now. God loves to whisper just the right things at just the right time. Just keep listening. — Mark Gonzales * mark@quillpress.org