

Keep It Simple

*After establishing herself as a tough but fair judge in New York's court system, making a name for herself as the blunt and abrasive family court judge on a #1 syndicated television show, ruling on hundreds of cases involving relationship disputes, and hearing thousands of excuses, complaints, and tales of woe, Judge Judy Sheindlin finally took her common sense brand of wisdom to the bookstore. To date, her repertoire includes such in-your-face titles as: Win or Lose by How You Choose; Beauty Fades, Dumb is Forever; You're Smarter Than You Look; Don't Pee On My Leg and Tell Me It's Raining; and perhaps her signature book – **Keep It Simple, Stupid**. After all, Judge Judy has now carved out three successful careers by repeating that message over and over.*

I like to say it this way: Common Sense Isn't All That Common. A lot of times the worst catastrophes human beings create have their roots in ignoring the simplest of things. It happened again just this week ...

Early on Thursday afternoon, Unit 5 of the Eastlake Plant owned by FirstEnergy in Ohio tripped out of service. Apparently, the company's computerized system for monitoring and controlling its transmission and generation system was working properly, but a simple thing – an alarm system designed to catch problems in the system – was not.

The glitch went unreported until approximately 4:10 that afternoon, when three more FirstEnergy transmission lines in Ohio apparently tripped and started a chain reaction. 21 power plants went down in the next three minutes, causing a widespread blackout across parts of the Northeast and Midwest US, along with parts of central Canada. At the height of the blackout, more than 60 million customers were affected.

Three deaths were tied directly to the outages – two in Ottawa and one in New York. Vacationing families in major cities spent an uncomfortable night sleeping on the street. The stock market hiccupped. Cellular phones became useless as towers blacked out. New York City alone lost a half-billion dollars in revenue. And while officials at every level were quick to reassure the public that this was not an act of terrorism, others were equally quick to point out that terrorists around the world would certainly be paying attention as the power grid exposed its own weaknesses. An alarm bell. Something so simple, but with such far-reaching consequences.

Or, speaking of terrorism, how about this one ...

After years of intercepting "chatter" indicating that terrorists were plotting attacks involving New York, Washington and commercial aircraft, the various US security agencies fought a daily high-stakes, highly secretive battle to find the answer to the one crucial question – WHEN? Then, on September 10, 2001, the US National Security Agency intercepted two communications from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia. "Tomorrow is zero hour," said one. "The match begins tomorrow," said the other. However, human error got in the way. The messages were not translated until September 12, by which time the worst terrorist attack on US soil had cost the country nearly 3000 lives and billions of dollars in damage. The world would never be the same. One simple task overlooked.

Not paying attention to the simple things can have disastrous consequences in life. No, you're not likely to make an error that inconveniences 60 million or kills 3000, but the odds say you will make mistakes that will botch relationships, cost you money, hurt your kids or mess up your future plans. Just by ignoring the simple things.

It happens to the best of us. It almost happened to a man named Naaman ...

He was the supreme commander of the army of Syria, the military's highest ranking officer in that country. He was a man of great social standing and prominence, highly regarded because of the military victories he had won. As a result, he was also a man of great wealth ... **but he was a leper.**

Leprosy was a fatal disease that terrified the people of ancient times. It appeared in various forms and stages of infection, but once it became malignant it was a terminal condition. The skin turned white and became numb, then began to erupt in ulcers. The limbs would swell and the hands and feet became distorted. The bones and internal organs would be affected as the disease spread, and gangrene usually resulted.

Leprosy was called **SARA'AT** by the Jews, meaning "a smiting or a scourge." There was no way to deal with infectious leprosy in ancient times other than to separate the sufferers from the general population ("outside the camp"). Leprosy's symptoms showed on the outside, but it was primarily an internal disease of the nerve endings. As the disease progressed, more and more damage was done to the body by the sufferer themselves, as their sense of pain became deadened.

Everything else in Naaman's wonderful life would eventually come to nothing because he was afflicted with this incurable disease. There was only one cure for leprosy – a miracle!

And it is Naaman's search for that miracle that brings us to our story ...

Naaman had to go outside his own country for a cure; he brought with him a letter from his king, a large monetary gift, and a contingent of chariots and servants to impress the king of Israel.

But the king of Israel couldn't help him. In fact, he felt like Syria was trying to pick a fight with his country by even making the request! ("Am I God?")

Finally, word comes from Elisha the prophet to send Naaman to his house ("he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel"), and the frustrated king gladly obliges. However, the reception the great general Naaman receives is not at all to his liking.

2 Kings 5:9-13 (NLT) So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of leprosy." But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would surely come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! Aren't the Abana River and Pharpar River of Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel put together? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage. But his officers tried to reason with him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply to go and wash and be cured!"

When Naaman finally got to Elisha's house, it was a mere servant of the prophet who came to meet him. His message was both simple and humbling. And Naaman got angry! He wanted the cure to be accomplished by similar methods to those used in Syria.

Listen to him: "I thought ..." "I expected ..." "Why shouldn't I ..."

But once Naaman heard the message, he had only two choices: he could ignore it, try to cope on his own with his leprosy, and eventually die – or he could obey the word of God and be cured!

MANY PEOPLE ARE LIKE NAAMAN

- First, we have to realize that the world has no cure for sin. They aren't even doing a good job treating the symptoms! The disease just gets worse and worse!
- Sin is like leprosy – it's a disease that kills from the inside out. It's a curse that kills our sensitivity to God, to others, and to life.
- Some people try to impress God – or the church – with the fact that they are indeed a good person. But all of their achievements and possessions don't impress God in the least.
- Many go first to RELIGION to seek a cure for sin. But it is powerless to deal with the root cause!
- Later, as they finally turn to God, many people feel that He should accommodate them because of their position or religious pedigree. They are angered that God would send one of His servants to tell them what to do!
- They are even more insulted by the simple message they receive!

Thank God that Naaman had some servants who had more common sense than he did! They encouraged him to set aside his pride and simply obey the words of the prophet. After all, they said, if you were asked to do something hard or heroic, you would have done it!

The word "SIMPLE" means "not involved or complicated, easy, not elaborate or embellished, ordinary, unsophisticated, composed of only one thing, without additions or modifications."

Let me say it in the strongest possible terms today: We preach a SIMPLE gospel. This is not an exclusive club. Anyone is welcome to find Jesus!

Listen to the words of the Old Testament's most intelligent prophet ...

Isaiah 35:8 (KJV) And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

Isaiah 35:8 (MSG) There will be a highway called the Holy Road. No one rude or rebellious is permitted on this road. It's for God's people exclusively — impossible to get lost on this road. Not even fools can get lost on it.

Listen to the words of Paul, the greatest preacher among the Apostles ...

1 Corinthians 2:2 (MSG) I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is; then Jesus and what he did — Jesus crucified.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 (LB) But I am frightened, fearing that in some way you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to our Lord, just as Eve was deceived by Satan in the Garden of Eden. You seem so gullible: you believe whatever anyone tells you even if he is preaching about another Jesus than the one we preach, or a different spirit than the Holy Spirit you received, or shows you a different way to be saved. You swallow it all.

1 Corinthians 1:21-25 (NLT) Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never find him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save all who believe. God's way seems foolish to the Jews because they want a sign from heaven to prove it is true. And it is foolish to the Greeks because they believe only what agrees with their own wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended, and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the mighty power of God and the wonderful wisdom of God. This "foolish" plan of God is far wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is far stronger than the greatest of human strength.

It is not hard to obey God, but it is humbling. You have to be willing to "keep it simple." You have to be willing to listen to a humble messenger! IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK!

Deuteronomy 30:11-15 (KJV) For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

Deuteronomy 30:11-15 (MSG) This commandment that I'm commanding you today isn't too much for you, it's not out of your reach. It's not on a high mountain—you don't have to get mountaineers to climb the peak and bring it down to your level and explain it before you can live it. And it's not across the ocean—you don't have to send sailors out to get it, bring it back, and then explain it before you can live it. No. The word is right here and now—as near as the tongue in your mouth, as near as the heart in your chest. Just do it! Look at what I've done for you today: I've placed in front of you Life and Good, Death and Evil.