

Are you a Sherlock Holmes fan? You know, Sherlock Holmes, the most famous, fictional, crime detective in the English-speaking world, starting his run in the late 1800s and early 1900s! Well, although I read very little fiction, I'm a huge fan of the original Sherlock Holmes series of 56 short stories and four novels by medical doctor and author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Many movies have been made trying to capture Doyle's ideal of Holmes. And Doyle's century-old writings can be easily acquired online or in bookstores, although there are a host of writers over the decades who have co-opted Sherlock Holmes and written their own versions of Sherlock Holmes stories. Those wannabe writers have largely not even come close to replicating Doyle's skill and popularity. So, go check out Doyle's captivating adventures of Holmes!

So, why so much interest over many decades in Doyle's skillful unveiling of the Holmes character in bite-sized pieces? Because it's great storytelling! Because it's entertaining! Because it's mentally engaging! Because it's effectively distracting from the intensities of life! And because—at least for most readers—Doyle was a unique mystery writer whose approach can be insightful beyond mere entertainment. Here's a glimpse of why that may be—revealed by a quote from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself.

"I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose." Yeah, that's just about right—as a reader, I find Doyle's unpacking of Holmes's well-crafted adventures a welcome addition to my brain!

And one of my favorite short stories from Doyle about Holmes is "The Adventure of Silver Blaze." That's from the Doyle's collection of stories called *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. Now, here's just a bit of a spoiler alert—I'm going to give you a short sketch of the mystery and some of its key players, then reveal one of Holmes' main keys to solving the murder. But, hey, Doyle's staging of all the characters and their activities is so masterful, you will find reading the entire story captivating anyway. By the way, a 1970s TV film of the story of Silver Blaze starred famous actor Christopher Plummer—80 years after being written!

So, we start a brief recap to say that, in many of the Holmes stories, there's often an official government detective from the famous Scotland Yard—kind of an FBI for England—and that cop's name is Inspector Gregory. He's portrayed as a competent professional who gathers data and reaches solid conclusions. But, at the same time, Inspector Gregory is never quite up to the extraordinary skill levels of the great Holmes!

Picking up the actual story at hand, Silver Blaze is a famous racehorse owned by a Colonel Ross, and Silver Blaze goes missing just before a very big race. But the more pressing news is, that same night, Silver Blaze's trainer, John Straker, is found dead from a blow to the head!

There is a murder suspect, of course, a bookmaker named Simpson who had come to Ross's estate to evaluate Silver Blaze and another horse, too. But there were other folks around, a stable boy named Hunter who was drugged with opium in his spicy food. And there is a dressmaker named Derbyshire involved, and also Silas Brown, a neighbor of Colonel Ross, and also a shepherd with three sheep who became lame. And there was a dog on the Ross estate, of course. And don't forget other possible evidence introduced into the story: a stout walking stick, a gentleman's cravat, a candle, and a surgeon's tiny knife.

Holmes soon tracks down Silver Blaze at neighbor Brown's estate but leaves that aside for a time and goes about a deeper discovery and thinking process, piecing it all together. And here's a bit of the key dialogue.

Inspector Gregory asks, "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

Sherlock Holmes replies, "To the curious incident of the dog in the nighttime."

To which Inspector Gregory replies, "The dog did nothing in the nighttime."

And Sherlock Holmes says, "That was the curious incident."

You see, the dog didn't bark because *a stranger wasn't there during the night in question*. So, Holmes concluded that the only person moving about during the time of Straker's death was Straker himself, a man intimately familiar to Colonel Ross's dog. Turns out, Straker was killed by a blow from the hoof of

Silver Blaze...that's because Straker was trying to impact a big race by temporarily laming the horse by an essentially invisible nick with the knife. But Silver Blaze became alarmed and kicked Straker in the head.

So, the clinching point to Holmes' solution to the case was that the dog didn't bark, which eliminated strangers from suspicion! But Holmes pieced *all* the facts together for an elegant solution. And Inspector Gregory lacked the imagination to piece it all together, *including the key data point of the dog not barking.*

And that's the same thinking in some of my conversations about issues and strategies with executives, when I will sometimes say: "Hey, that's the dog that didn't bark." Or, maybe saying it in the present tense: "That's the dog that isn't barking—we're missing the point here!" Sometimes it's a curious, vital incident when *someone* or *something* is silent, yes, perhaps when that data point hasn't been rightly pursued! Yeah, many times in solving problems, *what's silent is just as or more important than what's loudly there!*

Let's be clear here. The truth is, involving and solving curious incidents of missing information that others have missed or deemed unimportant can be a very important key to solving the entire puzzle at hand. Part of my career has been as a turnaround executive—and my experience is that, yes, tough difficulties arise due to misunderstanding key, decisive factors in very thorny organizational problems...but that there is also often a critical lack of understanding of gathering information from untapped sources that appear seemingly irrelevant. Yeah, that can be all too common: an astute observation about the curious incident of the dog...followed by an Inspector Gregory-type of response revealing a critical lapse in detective work!

So, here's the most ironic parallel *of all time!* You see, for many, the seemingly remote event of the death of the man named Jesus on a hill two thousand years ago is simply a data point of no consequence in the unfolding of one's modern life...it's an irrelevant data point to be ignored! That's right, for them, Jesus's death on the Cross is much like the dog that didn't bark was for Inspector Gregory. And so, for them, considering Jesus's death on the Cross is folly, it's foolishness! Yes, 1 Corinthians 1:21, says, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." Yeah, folly to the world—but salvation to those who believe!

Next, 1 Corinthians 15:6 reports that the *resurrected* Jesus appeared to more than 500 people! *That's evidence!* But, like the dog's silent presence, is that valid evidence to *you?* ...Then, after that, God breathed Scripture through apostles like Paul, Peter, and John, and He anointed the likes of Mark and Luke for their gospels and early church history. This brought the case for *Christ and Him crucified* to an elegant fullness! It's in *just that very sense* that each of us can be an extraordinary Sherlock Holmes in discerning the key pieces of the completed puzzle of life...with the help of the Holy Spirit, who teaches all things. (John 14:26)

But many who see creation *choose not to see God's silent hand*, and they often have hardened their hearts even further. Recently, a smart man I know who witnessed for Jesus in his youth basically called the Bible merely human writings—not inspired by God. Yeah, to him, the Bible's core message is foolishness and folly. But *you* know Jesus died for all humanity, that any man or woman who calls upon the name of Jesus will be saved. So, we identify the unique event of the Cross as *the key*, a bit like the dog that didn't bark. Yes, the Cross speaks *silently and loudly* across the ages as the solution to sin and separation from God!

Now, let's pull back for just a minute to the widest possible view. Both *savviness in the fullness of spiritual truth* and *savviness in life's other important decisions* come from a trained mind and an open heart for comprehensively canvassing and absorbing all relevant sources of key information. And here's the thing. In a radically morphing world, the foundational leading of the Holy Spirit who teaches *all* things is key to those who would desire to astutely solve the important puzzles set before them.

So *this* is the ultimate path: God will lead you in all things! So that's true in solving all apparent puzzles and obstacles in life, from organizational dynamics to marriage issues to salvation and eternal life. Yeah. Seek after His wisdom, never neglecting the asking for His wisdom by the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit!

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Is your spiritual awareness and working connection to the Holy Spirit such that you have confidence that you are “involving and solving all the curious incidents” that need involving and solving? And how do you avoid irrelevant “rabbit trails” that are imposters to a quality process, rabbit trails that actually are a destructive distraction? Give examples and discuss.
2. To help ensure great results in decision-making in your workplace, what processes and people do you have in place with regard to curious incidents? Describe how you do that.
3. Take a moment to reflect here. It’s likely you have had a “curious incident” experience that truly transformed your thinking about the God’s desired fullness in your life. Share that experience. If you don’t have one, ask others in your circle to share theirs.