

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF FEAR

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Text: Romans 8:12-16

Behavioral psychologist John B. Watson carried on a famous series of experiments on “Little Albert,” an 11-month-old boy. “Watson conditioned Albert to fear baby toys that were thought to be inherently cute and cuddly, such as stuffed white rabbits. By presenting these objects to Albert at the same time that he frightened him with a loud noise, Watson showed that the baby could be conditioned to fear any fuzzy white object, including Santa Claus’s beard. He also showed that through the systematic presentation of white objects accompanied by positive stimuli he could extinguish Albert’s fear and cause him to like white objects again.” (Kornblum, 124)

In many ways we are like “Little Albert;” we have been taught to be fearful all our lives simply by living in a fallen world. Too often we get caught up in a cycle of fear that seems to feed on itself—never knowing why we feel the way that we do or what we can do about it. But for the child of God there is great hope and assurance that we can overcome fear and live a life of great hope and peaceful assurance in Jesus Christ.

I have made a couple of *observations* that draw attention to the problem and the solution concerning breaking the cycle of fear that seems to reoccur in our lives.

I. WE HAVE BEEN CONDITIONED TO FEAR.

A. We are conditioned or taught to fear by what we see and hear in a fallen world.

Examples:

TV news reports.

Evidently, only bad news is good news to the news agencies.

Lifetime “Television for women.”

Ann Landers receives an average of **ten thousand letters each month**—nearly all of them from people with problems. She was asked if there was one predominant theme in the letters she receives. She said, "**The one problem above all others seems to be fear.** People are afraid of losing their health, their wealth, and their loved ones. People are afraid of life itself."

B. We are conditioned to fear by a false perception of the enemy.

Remember the story of Black Bart?

In Luke 12:4-5 Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

C. We are conditioned to fear by superstitious beliefs.

What are some of the superstitious beliefs that even Christian people hold on to? People always die in sets of three.

II. WE MUST RECONDITION OUR HEARTS AND MINDS NOT TO BE FEARFUL.

A. We recondition or teach ourselves by refusing to believe an evil report and by choosing to believe God's Word.

Even when it would seem that our problems have us at a disadvantage the Holy Spirit will enable us to stand our ground.

Several years ago there was a well-known television circus show that developed a Bengal tiger act. Like the rest of the show, it was done "live" before a large audience. One evening, the tiger trainer went into the cage with several tigers to do a routine performance. The door was locked behind him. The spotlights highlighted the cage, the television cameras moved in close, and the audience watched in

suspense as the trainer skillfully put the tigers through their paces. In the middle of the performance, the worst possible fate befell the act: the lights went out! For twenty or thirty long, dark seconds the trainer was locked in with the tigers. In the darkness they could see him, but he could not see them. A whip and a small kitchen chair seemed meager protection under the circumstances, but he survived, and when the lights came on, he calmly finished the performance. In an interview afterward, he was asked how he felt knowing that the tigers could see him but that he could not see them. He first admitted the chilling fear of the situation, but pointed out that the tigers did not know that he could not see them. He said, "I just kept cracking my whip and talking to them until the lights came on. And they never knew I could not see them as well as they could see me."

This experience gives us a vivid parable of human life. At some point in our lives, all of us face the terrifying task of fighting tigers in the dark. Some face it constantly. Many people cope daily with internal problems that are capable of destroying them. They cannot visualize their problems or understand them, but their problems seem to have them zeroed in.

Thomas Lane Butts, *Tigers in the Dark*

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 205.

B. We recondition ourselves by focusing on the answer instead of focusing on the problem.

C. We recondition ourselves by believing in the nature of our heavenly Father.

Someone said, "The way to take the fear *out* of living is to put faith *in* the Lord."

In 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

CONCLUSION

An Arab chief tells a story of a spy who was captured and then sentenced to death by a general in the Persian army. This general had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals a choice between the firing squad and the big, black door. As the moment for execution drew near, the spy was brought to the Persian general, who asked the question, "What will it be: the firing squad or the big, black door?"

The spy hesitated for a long time. It was a difficult decision. He chose the firing squad.

Moments later shots rang out confirming his execution. The general turned to his aide and said, "They always prefer the known way to the unknown. It is characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet, we gave him a choice."

The aide said, "What lies beyond the big door?"

"Freedom," replied the general. "I've known only a few brave enough to take it."

-- Don McCullough, "Reasons to Fear Easter," Preaching Today, Tape No. 116.

As Christians we can actually embrace the unknown, because as the old song says, "God holds the future in His hands..."