

On Becoming Free
(“It is never too late to have a happy childhood.” Richard Bandler)

Preamble

One of the main churches in downtown Oakville is Knox Presbyterian. John Knox was a Scotsman who, in 1560, led the Parliament of Scotland to embrace the Reformation. The Church of Scotland was eventually organized along Presbyterian lines, meaning governed by councils of elders.

Knox was heavily influenced by John Calvin, a French reformer, and it was from Calvin that the Presbyterian Church derived many of its articles of belief, which included:

The doctrine of total depravity (also called "total inability"), which asserts that, as a consequence of the fall of humanity into sin, every person born into the world is enslaved to the service of sin. People are not by nature inclined to love God with their whole heart, mind, or strength, but rather all are inclined to serve their own interests over those of their neighbour. Thus, all people by their own faculties are morally unable to choose to follow God and be saved because it is not in their nature to do so.

The doctrine of unconditional election, of which the doctrine of predestination is its corollary, asserts that God has elected from eternity those whom he will bring to himself, not based on their virtue, or merit, or faith but, rather, on God's mercy alone.

The doctrine of limited atonement is the teaching that Jesus was punished in the place of sinners; and Calvinists argue that, since it would be unjust for God to pay the penalty for some people's sins and then still condemn them for those sins, all those whose sins were atoned for must necessarily be saved. Moreover, since God knows precisely who the elect are and since only the elect will be saved, there is no reason to believe that Christ atoned for sins in general, only for those of the elect.

The doctrine of irresistible grace asserts that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (that is, the elect) and, in God's timing, overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith.

The doctrine of preservation of the saints asserts that, since God is sovereign and his will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else, those whom God has called into communion with himself will continue in faith until the end. Those who apparently fall away either never had true faith to begin with or will eventually return to God.

Now, I just happen to be the owner of a book of sermons by R.C. Evans. In one of his sermons, delivered at either the Soho Street church and from the stage of the Princess Theatre, in Toronto in 1911, R.C. Evans set out to refute the doctrine of predestination, as presented in the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, as it was at that time (and may or may not still be, for all I know).

He began by acknowledging that there are, in fact, biblical verses that support the idea of predestination, such as Eph. 1:3.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,..."

On the other hand, opposed to the belief in predestination is the equally biblical doctrine of free will. For example, Deuteronomy 30:19.

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants...."

What does our church teach about predestination, and what do you believe about it? Interestingly, the strongest statements are found in the Inspired Version of the Bible and in the Book of Mormon. From Genesis 3:1-5

"And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying, That Satan whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning;

And he came before me, saying, Behold I, send me, I will be thy Son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore, give me thine honor.

But behold, my beloved Son, which was my beloved and chosen from the beginning, said unto me: Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him; and also that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten I caused that he should be cast down; and he became Satan.

Yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive, and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.

and from 2 Nephi, Chapter 1:

"For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass; neither wickedness; neither holiness nor misery; neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must be a compound in one. Wherefore, if it should be one body, it must remain as dead, having no life, neither death nor corruption, nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility. Wherefore, it must have been created for a thing of nought; wherefore, there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation.

... the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not

act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.

...Now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen; but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state which they were, after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. They would have had no children; wherefore, they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But, behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knows all things. Adam fell, that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall."

Predestination and Free Will

Now, all of that is just preamble to today's class, which is all about predestination and free will (and gaining the ability to choose, including the ability to choose how to think and feel).

In the early 20th century, physics was on the verge of becoming the first closed science. That is, some physicists, at least, believed that we knew all there was to know about the laws of the universe. Then came atomic physics and quantum mechanics, and we discovered that we really didn't know very much about the universe, after all.

What we now know is that the universe that we perceive is a fantasy. There may be – in fact, there probably is – a reality out there somewhere, independent of our perceptions of it, but our only contact with that reality is through the energy which impinges on our sense organs and the way in which our brains structure that experience. The reality that we live in, on a day-to-day basis, is the reality that we construct in our own minds. It is composed of the pictures and sounds and tastes and smells and feelings that are formed in our brains from the sensory information that we receive through our visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and kinaesthetic senses, plus the language that we use to structure those sensory experiences. Thus, we exist, for all time, in both an objective reality and a subjective reality.

Time itself exists for us only as memories of the past and fantasies of the future. The present moment, in which all time is experienced, is infinitely short but constantly shifting, the venturi through which the future pours into the past. The past exists for us only as we recall, in the present, the subjective reality – the sensory experiences and the language through which we structured them – that existed for us at the time our memories of those past events were created.

Because that experience was entirely subjective, and conditioned by who we were at the time, with whatever strengths and weaknesses we had at that time, and because the past exists for us only as we experience it in the present, it can become different for us if we can learn to experience it differently; and we can learn to do that, i.e., to experience the past differently, by reliving it in memory, but with those personal resources that we have now but which we did not have then. In fact, this can have a profound effect on the way in which we experience not only our past but our present and future as well. One way to do that is

through a couple of procedures that I want to show you: Time-Line Therapy and the Fast Phobia Cure.

Now, in this universe that we live in, something is always happening, and we are always responding to that “happening.” We begin by translating the energy that is impinging on our senses into “events,” and in so doing we create the reality in which we (then) live. However, those events have no inherent meaning in and of themselves – they are essentially meaningless until we give them meaning – and we do that by talking to ourselves about these events that we perceive to be happening in our world, and literally giving them whatever meaning they are to have in our lives.

If we are to get upset about the things that happening our lives, we have to upset ourselves about those events. How do we do that? Well, there are two routes to get to distress:

A. Event --> Negative thinking --> Physiological arousal --> Distress (disturbance, anxiety, anger)

B. Event --> Physiological arousal --> Negative thinking --> Distress (disturbance, anxiety, anger)

In this context, “negative thinking” just means thinking that contributes to getting upset. Without the thinking that contributes to getting upset, it is impossible for anyone to get upset.

A psychologist by the name of Albert Ellis (A New Guide to Rational Living) has identified a number of these different thought patterns that, because they put the person in conflict with the laws of the universe, contribute to his or her getting upset. These patterns of thought always include value judgements or evaluations of the way things are:

1. I don't get the love that I want to get, and (the judgement that) I should get the love I want.
2. I am not perfect, and (the judgement that) I should be perfect (never make mistakes, etc.)
3. Certain people are bad and (the judgement that) they should be punished.
4. The world is not the way it should be, and (the judgement that) that is disastrous.
5. External events cause most human misery and (the judgement that) they must be controlled in order to create happiness and avoid sorrow.
6. (the judgement that) The unknown should be feared, since it is potentially dangerous.
7. Taking responsibility for events is scary and (the judgement that) it should be avoided.
8. You need something stronger than yourself on which to rely and (the judgement that) you should turn your life over to someone or something else (Koffmann called this one Decidophobia)
9. The past determines the present, and (the judgement that), since I am not

responsible for the past, I should not be held responsible for whatever I do in the present.

10. Leisure is more precious than any other activity and (the judgement that) it should be sought out whenever possible.

His advice was to challenge yourself whenever you catch yourself telling yourself any of this kind of nonsense. This is what has been called Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, and it has been particularly effective in the treatment of depression.

There is another solution, however, and that involves getting rid of any negative emotion, including its physiological arousal, the other necessary component of getting upset – because it is impossible to be both calm and upset at the same time. This morning, I would like to show you a couple of ways to do that.

The first place to start is with establishing a resource anchor; and let's each of you go ahead and do that right now. Think of a time when you felt just the way you would want to feel, and let yourself re-experience those good feelings right here and now; and when you have gotten into those good feelings as fully as possible, I want you to establish an anchor or cue so that they can be recalled whenever you want. [Suggest various possible anchors.]

Next, choose some negative emotion that you would like to get rid of, so that it no longer has any influence on your life.

Then, imagine that you can just float way up in the air, and see far beneath you, stretched out in a line running from your past to your future, all the days of your life – a time-line of past and future memories, as it were.

Ask your unconscious mind to float you back in time until you are floating above and looking down on the root cause memory, the very first time you experienced that negative emotion which, if disconnected, will allow that negative emotion (and any limiting decisions that accompanied it, to disappear as a problem in your life.

Then, float further back in time, say another 30 minutes or so. And where is that negative emotion now? Has it disappeared? If not, imagine that you could just reach down into that memory and unhook any negative emotion that was attached to it, and let it just drift away. And any limiting decisions which you might have made at the same time as well.. Let them drift away, too.

Then, float down into that memory and experience it with equanimity, with peacefulness and calm. Preserve any positive learning that you may have had and... let go of any negative feelings and limiting decisions which may have been attached to that memory in the past.

If you are able to do that, with peacefulness and calm, come back along your time line through that and all similar memories, all the way to the present, only as fast as they can also re-evaluate themselves in light of your new ability to find peace and joy in acceptance of the flow of events in your life, free from the limiting decisions and distresses of the past. [If not, run the Fast Phobia Cure]

When you get back to the present, allow yourself to float way up above your time line again; and then let that whole scene fade away and come back to the here and now, back

to this sanctuary, rested and relaxed and feeling wonderful all over.

The Fast Phobia Cure

Float up out of that memory, and back twenty or thirty minutes further into the past, and turn facing the present so that you can look forward and down onto that memory; and floating there above your time line, I want you to create... in your mind's eye, a motion picture theatre, and imagine that you are up in the projection booth, looking down into the theatre. And in that theatre, you see yourself sitting, and looking at a black and white picture projected on the screen, a picture of yourself looking just the way you would like to feel – perhaps rested and relaxed, peaceful and calm, or perhaps joyful, bubbling with energy. Whatever you choose to feel is entirely up to you.

Mounted on the projector is a black and white movie of the incident which has been... causing you distress. Since you are up in the projection booth, switch on the projector and run the movie of that incident. Run it fairly quickly and, when it is over, freeze frame the movie, and you are left with that black and white picture of yourself looking just the way you would like to feel.

Then imagine that you could float up out of your seat into that picture on the screen and feel those good feelings for yourself. Change that black and white picture to colour and enhance it in any other way you wish... to feel even better, and take another minute or two to enjoy those good feelings.

Remaining in that picture on the screen, enjoying those good feelings while the you that is in the projection booth rewinds the movie... in colour, taking no more than five or six seconds – you know that movies always rewind faster than they run forward – and when it is rewound, turn off the projector and you are left with that now coloured picture of yourself looking just the way you want to feel. Let the you that is on the screen take another minute or two to enjoy those good feelings, and then let that entire movie theatre scene fade away, and you are left floating once again above your time line.

Then do it over and over again until you can float down into that memory and experience it with equanimity, with peacefulness and calm.

In your mind's eye, create a motion picture theatre, and imagine that you are up in the projection booth, looking down into the theatre. And in that theatre, you see yourself sitting and looking at a black and white picture projected on the screen, a picture of yourself looking just the way you would like to feel – perhaps rested and relaxed, peaceful and calm, or perhaps joyful, bubbling with energy. Whatever you choose to feel is entirely up to you.

Run the black and white movie of the incident which has been... causing you distress. Switch on the projector and run the movie of that incident. Run it fairly quickly and, when it is over, freeze frame the movie, and you are left with that black and white picture of yourself looking just the way you would like to feel.

Float up out of your seat into that picture on the screen and feel those good feelings for yourself. Change that black and white picture to colour and enhance it in any other way you wish... to feel even better, and take another minute or two to enjoy those good feelings.

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the projector and you are left with that now coloured picture of yourself looking just the way you want to feel. Take another minute or two to enjoy those good feelings, and then let that entire movie theatre scene fade away, and you are left floating once again above your time line, feeling at peace, at last.