

Finding Intimacy in a World of Fear

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Summary by Belita D. Mitchell, April 21, 2010

Law postulates that since September 11, 2001 we live in a climate of fear. In 7 chapters he explores his own personal “journey through this landscape of fear” with the hope of helping his readers get a “handle” on ways to achieve intimacy in spite of the prevalence of fear.

- ❖ The climate of fear destroys trust
- ❖ Lack of trust reduces life to risk management (a reactive process)
- ❖ Life as risk management destroys intimacy
- ❖ Lack of intimacy destroys the primary support for facing fears: community
- ❖ Community requires the presence of vulnerability and truth telling

In his early discussion, Law reiterates that “fear is not the problem.” Avoiding fear is the problem. He quotes two separate sources identifying fear as a basic emotion which serves “as an intuitive response to potential danger”. (pg 8)

- ❖ Facing fear requires that we ponder, meditate and follow the fear to the worst case end point
- ❖ Avoiding fear results in phobias; the longer you avoid the fear, the more it grows
- ❖ Fear moves us to act; phobias can paralyze us
- ❖ Taking time to ponder fear can often lead to opportunities for ministry

Marketers, politicians and the news media “evoke fear in consumers, voters or their targeted audience” to command attention.

- ❖ Evoking fear to gain attention is achieved by linking the competition, opponent, or enemy to other persons, events or groups that have entrenched us with fear
- ❖ “What you fear is rarely what you think you fear—it is what you link to fear” (pg 28)
- ❖ The marketers, politicians and news media offer “symbolic substitutes” for what will alleviate fear (draws analogy to Jesus overthrowing the tables of the money changers)
- ❖ Symbolic substitutes obstruct the activity of facing fears, working through them and uncovering the opportunities for ministry

Using the incident of 9-11-01 as a backdrop again, Law discusses how human communities have employed rituals, rules and technologies to address fears. He then offers his alternate version of the

color coded threat-level system suggesting ways people could come together developing trusting communities to face their fears (pgs 46-47)

- ❖ Constructive rituals can enable individuals and communities to work through their fears: some examples cited were sacred rituals (prayer, confession, baptism, etc.) and the liturgy; contributing money to the families of 9/11 victims
- ❖ Rules and technologies can create *the illusion* of safety; many become rituals; yet they actually do little to keep us safe
- ❖ There is a need to create communities which allow people to share their fears honestly and offer support in facing those fears

In using the media account of Army Private Jessica Lynch's capture and release while in Iraq, Law introduces the concepts: Fear-Conquerer, Fear-Bearer and Fear-Miner. These are borrowed terms the author modifies somewhat (pg 55) and uses the first two as descriptives for how the media influenced public thinking on ways to deal with fear. The third concept is offered as an opposite alternative to the first two and is linked to the way Jesus taught fearful people to "mine" from their fears wisdom and knowledge of grace, forgiveness, justice and the seeds of ministry (pg 62).

- ❖ Fear conquerers deal with fear through acts of aggression; fear bearers embody fear and take on roles of victimization
- ❖ Both of the first two approaches avoid facing fear and working through it, negating the value of fear

Using the text from John 8:3-11, (the woman accused of adultery), Law demonstrates Jesus' way of forcing both fear conquerors and fear bearers to look inward at their own fear.

- ❖ Pondering our fears and following them to their worst case end point allows us to put them in wider context; this wider context enables us to find the gifts imbedded in our fears
- ❖ The text illustrates different lessons for both the fear conquerors, the accusers; and the fear bearer, the woman; (the former discovering compassion and mercy; the latter, uncovering the primary yearning of God)
- ❖ Jesus demonstrated "the greater story of life is not about being afraid of fear, but facing it head on" (pg 64)

Continuing the thread of scripture as example, Law uses the text from Exodus 1:8-12, 13-14 to introduce discussion of Fear-Exploiter, Fear of God and Intimacy with God

- ❖ Fear-Exploiters use fear to control others thus maintaining and increasing power
- ❖ Fear of God was implemented by God through the covenant to prevent the Israelites from becoming fear conquerors or fear exploiters; it shapes and forms respectful communities
- ❖ Jesus invites us to focus on our relationship as daughters and sons of God, moving beyond fear to love, knowledge and intimacy with God

❖ Intimacy with God through Jesus enables us to create trustful communities

In the last two chapters, Law continues to weave autobiographical experience with scriptural reference and discusses the importance of trust, vulnerability, and truth telling to establish intimacy. This is best done within the context of community.

Significant Works Cited

Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear* (New York: Dell, 1997)

Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear* (New York: Basic Books, 1999)

Miriam Greenspan, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear and Despair*, (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2004)

Wole Soyinka, *Climate of Fear*, (New York: Random House, 2005)