

Is the Devil Trying to Keep You in a Box?

Tony and I used to have a dog called Sugar—a faithful and loyal companion, though of dubious parentage and limited intelligence. Sugar had one major character flaw. She loved to wander. We live in a house with a fenced yard and an electric gate across the driveway. Sugar used to hide, lying in wait, until a car went through the gate. Then, just as the gate was closing the final few inches, she would make her bid for freedom. She would return several hours later, exhausted but happy.

When we decided to put a stop to her adventures, we installed an invisible fence across the driveway. If dogs approach an invisible fence too closely, a little battery on their collar gives them a small jolt of electricity. They soon learn their boundaries.

After a couple of, shall we say, shocking experiences, Sugar learned to stay within the confines of our yard. In fact, long after the battery in her collar had died, Sugar would sit, wistfully gazing at the liberty that lay on the other side of an open gate without making any attempt to escape. She had become conditioned to her limitations.

As women in the church, we too, have been conditioned to live within boundaries.

Harriet Tubman, who led many slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad, said, “I freed a thousand slaves. I would’ve freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves.”

After the Emancipation, most slaves stayed where they were. Some had no idea they were now free, and others had no idea how to survive outside of slavery. Many entered into

sharecropping arrangements with their former masters, getting paid a pittance for the same work they had formerly done as slaves. It took generations for the reality of freedom to take effect.

The worst kind of prison is that of the mind, where a person accepts adverse circumstances as the natural order of things without realizing the perceived cage bars don't really exist. They are held captive only by their own thoughts.

As women, many of us are imprisoned by what we have known from the past.

Excerpts from The Black Swan Effect: A Response to Gender Hierarchy in the Church