

“Blame [Space] Less”

The Blame Less Project, Part 1

What if you could dramatically change your life for the better by doing less of something that already comes naturally?

And when I say “change your life,” here’s the kind of change I’m talking about!

- If you are trying to provide for your needs, or if you’d like to be able to give more generously to causes that matter, or pay off your college loans—doing less of this thing can make a \$30,000 difference—or more—in your annual salary!
- If you’re a parent or grandparent or teacher or coach or someone who cares about kids, it’s one of the most important assets you can pass on to the next generation
- If you lead a team.... this will increase both creativity and productivity

I can point you to studies where

- businesses *increased profit* when they started doing this less
- If you work in a hospital, doing less of this leads to fewer lawsuits and even fewer deaths!

It’s the key to taking ownership for your life.

It’s one of the most attractive qualities you can have.

Doing less of this can turn potential adversaries into allies!

And, as I mentioned earlier, you already know how to do this thing. You just need to do this thing that you’re already doing.... every day.... less than you do now.

That thing is.... BLAME.

Blame is a really, really big deal

In 2020, we did a series a series called *The Blame Less Project*. And over the course of THAT series, I had person after person come up to me and say something like this...

- Chris.... When you first mentioned that we were going to do an entire series on blame, I thought, “Why a SERIES?”
- But then, a week or two INTO the series, I found myself noticing that blame is everywhere!
- As time went on I found myself thinking, “Hey. This Blame Less thing is a really big deal!”
- And before the series was over I found myself convinced that this is something that OTHERS need to hear about too!

Blame is something that most of us do instinctually—faster the speed of conscious thought. And here’s something that you’ll want to keep in mind!

The frightening truth is that when we’re not thinking about our thinking, our thinking starts to think on its own. –Rory Vaden

It's easy to spot blaming behaviors in others. But we all blame... a LOT!

Blame is everywhere. Over the course of this series, one of the names that you'll hear us reference is *Dr. Brene' Brown*. She says this...

We live in a blame culture—we want to know whose fault it is and how they're going to pay. Brene' Brown

Blame culture leads to bad behaviors.

Did you know that when we blame others, or when others blame us, our brains interpret blame the same way they interpret *a physical attack*?

When someone blames us, or when we blame others, we literally stop thinking in the thinking part of our brains and we focus our energy on attacking others or defending ourselves!

There's a better way!

Over the course of this series

- We're going to open our BIBLES to the Old Testament Books of *Genesis* and *Nehemiah*.... and we're going to open the New Testament to *Matthew's Gospel*.... and Paul's Letters to the *Romans* and to the *Galatians*
- And we're going to point you to outstanding, supplementary resources, that take these BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES and apply them to our *inner world* and *unique circumstances* and *relationships* and *teams* and *workplaces*

There is so much good, Biblically-anchored, science-based, and actionable content in the weeks ahead!

Here's the 10,000-foot flyover of where we're headed. Next week we'll dive into this...

Blame goes back to the beginning.

Our minds default to blame instantly and automatically. Why is that?

Next week we're going to look into the Genesis of Blame and I find it interesting that Christians and non-Christians both agree that blame goes back to the dawn of humanity.

If you believe what the Bible says about our origins, as many of us do, one of the first things that the first people did when sin entered the world was to blame God, blame the devil, and blame one another.

But here's the thing.... those who believe humanity evolved over the millions of years also believe that blame goes back to the beginning! Advocates for evolution believe blame is a defense mechanism that the earliest people developed as a means to protect their standing in their tribe. We learned to blame to avoid getting voted off the island.

Those who study blame—both Christian and non-Christians—agree that blame goes back to the beginning.

Blame begins with an attempt, by our brain, to protect us.

We all have a deep need to feel competent and to be liked. When we aren't thinking about our thinking, our brains think they are doing us a favor by finding something or someone outside of ourselves to blame so that we can protect our self-image

But here's the problem.... *BLAME usually BACKFIRES!*

Let me give you three examples....

Blame will hold you back!

1) Blame reinforces glass ceilings

A glass ceiling is something invisible that keeps you from leveling up in life.

When we see ourselves as victims of our circumstances, we make those glass ceilings thicker! We're going to do a deeper dive into in week 3 of this series.

I love this quote by Henry Ford. It's overstated. But there's a LOT of truth to it.

Whether you believe you can do a thing or not, you're right. –Henry Ford

Humans have a unique response-ability.

When we blame less and use our unique response-ability more, we are capable of shattering glass ceilings and unlocking our full, God-given potential!

And we have some great, new resources to introduce you to!

Here's second way that blame holds people back...

Blame will hold you back!

2) Blame triggers the Triangle Trap

I was introduced to the Triangle Trap by our family counselor. It opened my eyes to something that I now see everywhere!

Here's the model....

When we aren't thinking about our thinking, and someone does something that we don't understand or agree with, our brains see our world through the lens of *oppressor*, *victim*, or *rescuer*.

Some call this the *Drama Triangle*.

In Week 4, we're going to have a candid conversation about blaming others.

When we jump too quickly to blame, we turn potential allies into adversaries.

Instead of working together on the *problem*, we choose *sides*! Are you with us or against us?

When we trigger the triangle trap, energy and effort that could be channeled into *solving problems* and building bridges is diverted instead into defending and attacking positions.

That's Week 4. In it, we're going to turn to the Gospel of Matthew and see how Jesus laid the foundation for problem solving tools and insights that we now call *the contribution system* and the *fundamental attribution error*.

Let me give you one more example. A third way that blame will hold you back is this...

Blame will hold you back!

3) Blame is a slippery slope to shame and scapegoating

When the line between "what I DID" and "who I AM" gets blurred, it's a slippery slope to SHAME...

And shame can lead you to some of the darkest, deepest, and most isolating pain and hopelessness that there is.

When line between "what THEY DID" and "who THEY ARE" gets blurred, or when we blame others before we have all the facts, it's a slippery slope to *scapegoating*.

And when we become convinced that the problem is personified in another, there's not only no hope for reconciliation, that's the kind of thinking that justifies racism, what's happening right now in the Middle East, and in humanity's worst moments.

Before we open our Bibles together, it's important to point something out...

Remember, this isn't the *blame never* project!

Sometimes blame is necessary!

When it comes to blaming circumstance, if your car won't start, it's not going to start until someone figures out why!

When it comes to blaming others, everything breaks down when people aren't held accountable for their actions. Our entire judicial system depends on people doing this well.

This isn't the don't-blame-ever-in-any-situation project! It's the blame [space] less project.

One of the things that many of us discovered in 2020, is that when we blame less, we blame better.

When we pause and think about our thinking, we become better at identifying *what's really going on* and working together with others to solve problems.

Let's learn to embrace that space, we can move forward.

The way most people blame holds them back.

When a kid loses a soccer game, and we try to make them feel better by blaming the ref or blaming the weather or blaming their teammates what are we teaching our kids?

Don't you want to teach the next generation a better way?

When there's a breakdown at work and we immediately blame another person or a department or the market what's the opportunity cost?

Blame culture at work is TOXIC to team goals!

When the results of twenty-two separate studies on blaming others were analyzed and synthesized at the University of Connecticut, 77 percent of those studies revealed that blaming others made things worse!

AND... in the remaining 23 percent, there was zero benefit.

Did you hear that? The WAY people are blaming isn't working!

- 23% of the time.... it doesn't help
- And 77% of the time... it actually makes things worse

Please repeat after me.... *"There must be a better way."*

Can you imagine a world where people blamed less? Politicians.... News outlets.... Influencers.... Supervisors.... Employees.... Teammates.... Fans.... Families.... Couples.... Brothers.... Sisters.... Teens.... Kids.... All of us!

Not *never*.... just *less*.

I believe that's something that the God of the Bible doesn't only want for us to experience as a church community, but something He wants us to share with others!

This morning I Googled Blame [Space] Less.... and.... as of 5:39 am this morning.... According to Google.... Blame [Space] Less is not a thing!

Everything is a thing on Google!

- Blameless.... one word with no space is a thing.... Google gave me 1.5 billion links!
- Blame [Space] never is a thing too.... Google gave me 322 million links

But.... according to Google.... blame [space] less is not a thing.

With God's help.... *let's make it a thing!*

Let's give people language for a better way!

It might take 3 years. It might take 5 years. It might take 10 years....

But I envision a day when we've created an online Blame Less Course.

And there are people in all 50 states who have:

- 1) Have completed the Course
- 2) Are living the lessons
- 3) And are sharing their stories!

By God's grace, let's make Blame [Space] Less a thing!

All of this is anchored in Scripture.

Let's open our Bibles together to the Book of Romans.

Romans is one of the most magnificent expositions of the Christian faith ever written.

It is SO theologically rich! My first 20-page paper was on just ONE VERSE from this remarkable Letter!

Romans takes us back to the beginning! And, from there, unpacks humanity's need for someone to rescue us from ourselves.

Romans reminds us that ALL have sinned and even when our Gracious Father makes His Laws known, it's as if those very Laws just illuminate the brokenness that separates us from God and one another.

But God has made a way to save us and set us free through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, the Messiah.

And we're invited into a faith-based family made up of men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile....

Chapters 1-11 lay that theological foundation.... Then comes Chapter 12... Here's Verse 1....

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. –Romans 12:1 (ESV)

When we come across a THEREFORE in the Bible.... It's usually a good idea to ask [what is it there for]

Here's how one scholar put it...

The word "therefore" is one of the most underrated words in the English language. "Therefore" is like a hinge on a door that acts as the link between the wall and the door

and enables the one to relate to the other. In Scripture, “therefore” holds together doctrinal principles and practical application.

The exposition of Christian truth requires a response in the enlightened heart, and with this in mind the Apostle asks his readers to do some realistic evaluation of their application of spiritual truth. –D. Stuart Briscoe

This “therefore”—in Verse 1—points back to everything that comes before.

In the ancient world, people were obsessed with sacrifice! Paul takes something they can readily relate to and says, “We’ve entered into a new age and the time for sacrificing sheep and goats is over.”

In light of all that God has done for us, and the sacrifice that He made on our behalf, of His own Son, we are challenged to present ourselves as living sacrifices!

Paul goes on, then, to explain more about what that looks like when we live it out.

Verse 2.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. –Romans 12:2 (ESV)

These words were written about 2000 years ago. And, 2000 years later....

Science is catching up with Scripture

Did you know that we can literally re-wire our brains? We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Our minds not only can be renewed and transformed, the same, broken impulses that blame without thinking, can be *rewired* to pass through the *thinking* and *testing* and discerning centers of our brains!

The term we use today is neuroplasticity.

If we function on autopilot, here’s what happens....

Our brain likes to believe the things it already believes. We’re magnets for information and experiences that confirm the things we already think about ourselves and the world. –Jon Acuff

In contrast, there’s an invitation here, in an ancient Text that we believe is God-breathed, to retrain our brains and transform our minds. One of my sources put it like this...

For Paul, the mind and the body are closely interconnected, and must work as a coherent team. Having one’s mind renewed and offering God one’s body are all part of the same complete event. –NT Wright

We can get that same, automatic blame cue, that works *against us* working *for us*. I think the Biblical concept of redemption is rightly applied here!

The idea that we can redeem broken ways of thinking is so well-documented that there's even a phrase that people call Hebb's Law. It goes like this...

Neurons that fire together, wire together. –Hebb's Law

When we blame first—over and over again—we're creating a super-pathway in our brains to do what? To blame first!

What if we invite the same Spirit of God Who inspired Paul's words to help us rewire our minds?

I encourage you to read all of what comes before and after the *therefore*.

Chapters 1-11 lay the *foundation*. Chapters 12-16 provide the *application*.

Paul is casting a vision for a new and better way of doing life together—a new kind of community that's anchored to foundational truth and aligned with life and teaching of Jesus the Messiah.

In Paul's day, community building was hard, messy work.

There were so many things dividing people in those days and the headwinds didn't just include a culture that saw things differently. There were periods of time when Rome actively persecuted Christians!

Blame works *against* the kind of community that Paul casts a vision for.

In Chapter 8.... Paul says we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us....

how often do you hear church people blaming circumstances.... "*Tik Tok is making this so hard*"....

Imagine if first century Christians *blamed* circumstances instead of *believing* that the same power that raised Christ from the dead was available to them?

With every challenge we blame, our glass ceiling gets thicker and thicker and it blurs our vision of a God through Whom all things are possible!

In two weeks, we'll look at one of the example of a man named Nehemiah who overcame circumstances that appeared impossible to most.

And the week after that, we'll look more closely at the vision that Scripture casts for the church of Jesus Christ... a diverse community that's like a close-knit family.... or one body with many parts.... all of us working together for a common vision.

How often do we see church people forming factions... and blaming one another... instead of coming together as a family and doing the hard, messy work of working through our stuff together? The Bible has exceptional guidance for how we do that!

In three weeks, we'll look at the words of Jesus Himself...

As we begin to bring today's teaching to a close, let's go back to Romans one more time. Chapter 12 closes with these indicators that we're on the right path....

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor . . . Bless those who persecute you . . . Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. –Romans 12:9-21 (ESV)

When we did our “Dear Suburban Church” series and worked our way through Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, I was struck by Paul's passion and commitment to the churches that he founded.

Paul was all in on Jesus' vision to create communities of faith that were living and modeling a better way. As far as it depends on you, are you modeling these things?

Blaming less is a better way.

And here's our invitation to you as we begin this series...

Our Series invitation:

- 1) Let's retrain our brains
- 2) Let's reclaim our lives
- 3) And let's share our stories

As this series goes on, I hope all of us catch a more vivid vision of the difference this Blame Less Project can make.

Imagine if we, with God's help, can inspire and equip blame less enthusiasts in all 50 states!

- It can literally save lives....
- I've heard it said that all of us have a million-dollar idea. Think of all the good you could do in this broken world with an extra million dollars!

I know we're just a week in. If all that sounds too lofty this early in the series, let me close with this everyday example.

One Thursday, when all this was new back in 2020, I was working on one of the Blame Less messages. I had a haircut scheduled in St. Paul that day with my guy Ethan and it normally took me 20-25 minutes to get there.

I would normally leave 30 minutes before the appointment to give myself a 5-minute margin in case I hit an extra red light or two.

That particular Thursday was a particularly crazy week.... and I decided to squeeze in one more 5-minute task before I left.

And what do you think happened on the way there? I hit every red light!

And, instinctually, with no effort at all on my part, my brain started saying, "Remember to blame those red lights."

About 5 red lights in, down by the Shoreview Super Target, I didn't just hit a red light, there was a TRAIN!

And not just any train, it was one of those extra-long trains, and not just one of those extra-long trains one of those extra-long trains that stop, and go backwards a little bit, and stop again before going forward!

So now I'm clearly going to be late. And what does my brain say? "Remember to blame the red lights AND the train!"

Another 4-5 red lights later, I reach the spot where Dale crosses 94.... only I can't cross Dale where Dale crosses 94 because there's CONSTRUCTION!

I got re-routed back to Lexington—where I'd just come from—and what does my brain say? "Remember to blame the red lights AND the train AND the detour!"

But then I noticed my wrist, and this little black band, with white lettering, that says, "The Blame Less Project."

And I thought to myself, "I should probably DO this thing that I'm going to talk about on Sunday!"

And.... when I arrived.... late.... instead blaming the red lights.... and blaming the train.... and blaming the construction. I said, "Ethan.... I'm sorry. I didn't give myself enough time today. I know your time is valuable and I'm sorry if I threw your schedule off."

And Ethan looks at me and says, "Chris, 'I'm sorry' are two words I almost never hear." And he went on to say that people are late.... a lot.... and they almost always have someone or something to BLAME instead of taking personal responsibility.

We ended up having a little Blame Less BONDING moment.... and that opened up a whole conversation about the Blame Less Project....

As I mentioned earlier, we did a series called The Blame Less Project three years ago....

THIS is THE BLAME LESS PROJECT 2.0!

- We're circling back because we promised we would
- We're circling back because more than 200 of you weren't with us back then!
- We're circling back because with new content that will make this series more than a refresher if you were here with us in 2020
- And we're circling back because we have UNFINISHED BUSINESS.... We're developing a plan to get this message out to others.

For now.... I encourage you to pick up one of these wristbands at the Welcome Center...

Use this as a reminder to start blaming less.... and you'll be surprised the difference it can make!

Before we end our time together.... Let's seal our time with a song....

I want to invite the WORSHIP BAND back up.... and thank Kristy for praying through today's set list.... as she always has...

This CLOSING SONG is a great one to BEGIN THIS SERIES.... it's a song of SURRENDER...

When we blame.... the way most people do.... we ADD to the brokenness and division all around us...

There's a BETTER WAY.... the way of renewal.... and redemption.... and reconciliation....

Let's recommit ourselves to that end (pray).