

## **“The Genesis of Blame” The Blame Less Project, Part 2**

Have you ever heard of Koko the gorilla?

Koko was a remarkable ape who lived in the San Francisco Bay area.

Over the course of Koko’s 46-year lifetime she learned how to sign about 1000 words.

And you can find video clips on YouTube of Koko using her words to talk to celebrities like Robin Williams and Mr. Rodgers.

Well, one night Koko was playing with a toy cat and she accidentally broke it.

And do you know what Koko did the next morning? She blamed one of her caregivers!

Where did that come from? AND... why are we tempted to do the exact same thing?

Three years ago, we did a series called *The Blame Less Project* and one of the things that I was personally convicted of back then was how quickly and how often my own mind goes right to blame!

I don’t have to think about blaming. I don’t have to work at it. My mind just goes there automatically—and lightning fast!

Why?

- Why are we so quick to blame our circumstances when we aren’t eating the way we think we should, or exercising the way we think we should, or saving the way we think we should, or studying the way we think we should. or giving the way we thing we should or even praying the way we think we should
- why are we so quick to blame when someone else gets the promotion or when the other team wins or when we don’t do well on a test or when something goes wrong at work?

Or when red lights and a train and construction make us late for a haircut?

Why is blame such a primal and instinctual response?

And when I say “primal” and “instinctual” I mean that literally! Look up the words “primal” and “instinctual”.... blame is like that!

When we don’t stop to question our primal blame instinct.... and just react... it almost never makes things better.... and almost always makes things worse.

Which is why we’re doing something that we rarely ever do.... We circling back to a teaching series that we’ve done before...

- 1) We’re circling back to this topic because blame is a really, really big deal
- 2) We’re circling back to this topic for the more than 200 of you who *weren’t* with us in 2020

- 3) We're circling back with new content that will make this series more than a refresher those who *were here* three years ago
- 4) AND... we're circling back because we have unfinished business.... we'll say more about that in this series goes on...

TODAY we're going to explore the ORIGINS of blame.

- Why... is the impulse to blame is so universal?
- Why... does it happen so lightning fast?
- Why... the temptation to blame is so strong?
- AND.... What's on the line... if we let our primal instincts take the lead?

Let's get started....

### **Blame goes back to the beginning.**

Did you know... that almost everyone who traces blame back.... can trace it back to the dawn of humanity? This is true for those who believe that we have Creator Who created us in His own image and those who don't!

Let's start with those who believed life began on its own and evolved over billions of years. As they trace blame back, they trace it back to a primitive attempt on the part of primitive brains to protect us!

There's a section of our brains with tiny sensors that identify potential threats faster than the speed of conscious thought.

The same sensors that warn us that we're about to be eaten by a cave bear also warn us when our brain thinks that our status in the tribe might be in danger!

Here's how someone applied that to Koko's attempted cover-up...

**Koko, like early humans, automatically blamed someone else for her misstep because she feared retribution and possibly rejection from her "tribe"—in this case, the group made up of her keepers. Our ancestors would have known that rejection by their tribe would have meant certain death. Even our primate predecessors learned the not-so-subtle art of pointing the finger of responsibility elsewhere.**

**Ben Dattner** (*Credit and Blame at Work*, Pages 34-35)

A man named Daniel Kahneman won a Nobel Prize for research that points to humans not being as rational as we think we are!

And I'd like to point out that he won that Nobel Prize in economics! Blaming impacts everything! Relationships, performance, and even your bank account!

In his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* he describes two systems of thought:

- System 1 is our *animal* mind—it's fast, instinctive, and emotional
- System 2 is our *rational* mind—it's slow, deliberate, and logical.

Guess which system is more likely to influence the other? System 1! Our animal mind!

We ran into this when we did a series on ANXIETY back in 2019 . . . Here's a quote from a book called *Don't Feed the Monkey Brain* by Jennifer Shannon.

**Even from our earliest stage of life . . . we can perceive safety or danger in the facial expressions of our parents... We have always hunted and housed ourselves together in packs, so we can watch out for each other. Your ancestors' social status within their families and tribes was crucial to their survival.**

**In order to protect your social status, your monkey mind is always watching and listening to those around you, looking for signals whether you are respected, whether you are loved, and whether you belong. If you are alienating your neighbors, irritating your friends and family, or are a subject of scorn to your community, even if you are not aware of it, the monkey reads the signal and sounds the alarm.**

**Jennifer Shannon, LMFT (*Don't Feed the Monkey Brain*, Page 8)**

We all have deep, primal needs to feel competent and to be liked. When our brains believe that our self-image or social status is threatened, our brain instantly triggers CHEMICALS that gear us up to flee or fight.

Along with chemicals that help us cope with rejection!

can you see how blame can be an enticing drug?

- 1) We don't have to consciously administer it
- 2) And it helps us feel better about ourselves in that moment

But, with a show of hands, how many of you know that our primal blame instinct isn't always right?

And, with a show of hands, how many of you would say that when we're blaming or being blamed we are rarely at our best?

*Now.... those who embrace the theory of evolution believe that creatures can evolve beyond our primitive instincts! And we can use our creative capacities to build a better world!*

Humans have highly advanced sections in our brains that are capable of processing incredibly complex data.

And, not only that, we are also capable of physically altering how our minds work!

it's called neuroplasticity. last week we introduced you to hebb's law. here it is again in case you missed it.

**Neurons that fire together, wire together  
Hebb's Law**

We can physically transform our brains so that our primitive warning signals are re-routed to the more advanced thinking and processing centers!

This is the basis for what's known as *cognitive behavioral therapy* or CBT.

Through CBT, people are taught how to change old thinking patterns and develop new and better problem-solving skills.... Which have been proven effective in everything from....

- Reducing fear, stress, anxiety, and depression
- To improving marriages and relationships
- To overcoming eating disorders
- And more!

Remember, our brains are trying to help us. So, let's help our brains help us... and.... in doing so.... let's open up *new options to respond!*

Here's how one Marriage and Family Therapist put it...

**You have the capability to disrupt a system that your monkey mind has spent years refining but that is getting you nowhere. In its place you can discover a bigger world where the sky is the limit.**

**Jennifer Shannon, LMFT** (*Don't Feed the Monkey Mind*, Pages 66, 76)

We can retrain our brains to the point where the temptation to blame actually *triggers healthier habits!*

One of the many, exceptional resources that have come out since we did this series three years ago is *Soundtracks* by Jon Acuff. In his book, Acuff says this...

**Broken soundtracks never evolve into new soundtracks on their own . . .  
Replacing your soundtracks is about identifying what soundtracks you've been listening to and then owning the responsibility for changing them.**

**Jon Acuff** (*Soundtracks*, Page 59, 108)

See that word RESPONSIBILITY? Hold that word. Because we're going to circle back to it.

But first, let's take a look at the world's best-known creation account.

We just saw how *naturalists* believe that blame goes back to the beginning.

Did you know that blame also goes back to the beginning in both the Jewish Torah and Christian Bible?

Whether this is literal or allegory is another important conversation for another time.... All I want to do today is show you what's there!

Let's take a look at Genesis 1:1-2....

**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**

**Genesis 1:1-2 (ESV)**

These two Verses are loaded with meaning! How loaded?

In this Study Bible that I'm reading from.... the ESV Study Bible.... on this particular page these are the only two Verses on the *entire page!*

The rest of the page is *all commentary* on just these two Verses!

In the Verses that follow.... God SPEAKS.... His WORDS create a WORLD.... and that world is GOOD! This theme is repeated over and over again...

## **SLIDE**

### **Words create worlds**

- **And God said.... and it was good... (Genesis 1:3-5)**
- **And God said.... and it was good... (Genesis 1:9-10)**
- **And God said.... and it was good... (Genesis 1:11-13)**
- **And God said.... and it was good... (Genesis 1:14-19)**
- **And God said.... and it was good... (Genesis 1:20-23)**
- **And God said.... and it was good... (Genesis 1:24-25)**

The Creator brings forth light from darkness.... and order from chaos.... and life where there was no life.... and he creates a world filled endless possibilities.

Let's continue.... Beginning with Verses 26-31....

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" . . . in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them . . . God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was VERY GOOD.**

**Genesis 1:26-31 (ESV)**

After creating everything else.... God created a man and a woman.... in his own likeness.... and what does He say about His Creation now? (it was VERY GOOD)

The man and the woman... have everything they need to meet two of the deepest needs that humans have.... to feel competent and to be loved....

In addition to ensuring that they well-equipped for meaningful work.... and perfectly paired.... *The Creator also provides boundaries for their benefit!*

They have everything they need to flourish!

And the Text even adds this in Chapter 2, Verse 25.... It says they were "naked and unashamed".... *There's nothing that they feel a need to conceal from God or any other living thing!*

But then... we see how their words begin to create a very different world.... I encourage everyone to read ALL of Genesis 3.... and when you do... pay careful attention to what they do with the Creator's Words!

### **Words create worlds**

- **And the serpent said... (Genesis 3:1)**
- **And the woman said... (Genesis 3:2)**
- **And the man said... (Genesis 3:10)**

Their Creator's words bring light... and life... and order from chaos.... and no shame!

But the serpent.... and the woman.... and the man... twist the Creator's words.... and leave some of His Words out.... and they step outside of the beneficial boundaries that their Creator had put into place.

As a side note.... we're going to do a series someday on *overcorrecting*.... There's a growing trend of church people diminishing the importance of God's Word.... and even putting what the Bible teaches about obedience... up and against... what the bible says about love!

Was Jesus of Nazareth full of grace or truth? Scripture says He was full of BOTH!

Let's go back to our Text.... 3:8-9...

**And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"**

**Genesis 3:8-9 (ESV)**

What we're about to see here is a master class in how quickly we are to blame.... how blame makes things worse.... and how our Creator offers a better way!

Let's start with the profound nature of those last three words! "Where are you?"

- Did God know what happened? Yes.
- Did God know where Adam was? Yes.

In Hebrew, the word *man* and the word *you* are singular.... God doesn't *group everyone together* he holds each person accountable for *their part*....

God doesn't lead with an accusation.... he starts with a question, "Adam, where are YOU?"

When Adam gives an answer that minimizes his own contributions.... God gets more specific.... Verses 10-11....

**Adam said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"**

### **Genesis 3:10-11 (ESV)**

And what does Adam do... when God gives him a chance to take responsibility for his own actions? Adam blames! He blames Eve.... and even *blames God!* Verse 12...

**The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”**

### **Genesis 3:12 (ESV)**

So it begins.... and so it continues.... Verse 13....

**Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”**

### **Genesis 3:13 (ESV)**

Again.... the way that this plays out is a master class in what we’re advocating for with this Blame LESS Project! This is NOT the Blame NEVER Project!

When we said that last week.... you could see visible signs of relief on people’s faces! This is NOT the *Don’t Hold People Accountable Project!*

What the serpent did was WRONG! What Adam did was WRONG! What Eve did was WRONG!

And.... the Creator.... Who was in a position to SEE CLEARLY.... graciously gave Adam and Eve a chance to reflect on how THEY had contributed to what just happened....

But they didn’t.... they jumped right to blame.... and they are *held accountable for their actions...*

How many of you know the Story doesn’t end here?

The Creator doesn’t close the door on future reconciliation.... Even as He describes the consequences, His Words are embedded with the hope of a Savior that He will send in the fullness of time....

And the Creator covers their shame with clothing.... that appears to foreshadow the future sacrifice that He will make to demonstrate the extent of His love!

Let’s circle back to our original thesis....

Whether the human brain evolved over millions of years.... or was designed by a loving Creator Who formed us in His Image.... *You and I have a very sophisticated alert system that goes back to the beginning...*

AND.... as humans.... we ALSO have OTHER areas of our amazing brains where we can CHOOSE to process those thoughts!

## **Humans have a unique response-ability.**

Remember that word “responsibility” that we highlighted earlier? Humans have a unique ABILITY to consciously process and choose OUR RESPONSE when our PRIMITIVE INSTINCTS tempt us to *blame....* and *cover up....* and *twist words....* and *leave important facts out.*

Humans have a unique RESPONSE-ABILITY... to physically rewire our brains... so that we respond in HEALTHIER and more HELPFUL ways!

If you're taking notes.... I invite you to write this down too...

## **Words create worlds.**

As the most advanced mortal creatures on the planet.... our words create worlds! And I love the logo that our friends at MOCO created for The Blame Less Project!

I love that it's in a speech bubble! Because that's where it all begins! The worlds... we create.... as people... begin with what we tell ourselves and we say to others! Consider this quote by a retired Navy Seal....

**The most important conversations you'll ever have are the ones you have with yourself.**

**David Goggins**

Here's another great quote.... from that *Soundtracks* book...

**A plane can drop a bomb or food. A syringe can deliver poison or medicine. A stallion can start a stampede or win a race. The same is true of our thoughts.**  
**Jon Acuff**

Most of us share a lot of the same dreams!

- Of living meaningful lives
- Of having great relationships
- Of being able to care not only for our own basic needs.... but to be able to help others

And we live in a world that's filled with endless possibilities!

- There are new and exciting products to create.... important problems to solve.... and so much personal potential to unlock!
- There are so many incredibly people to meet.... each one of them bearing the very image of god
- There's work to be done that needs doing.... and there are relationships to be built

Let me ask you this question.... *What kind of world does blame create?*

Let me ask you another question.... *Is that the world you want to live in?*

What kind of world do we build.... or destroy.... when words get twisted and important details get left out?

What GOOD is left undone when we blame circumstance? What deeper levels of community could be experienced if we didn't COVER UP and HIDE like we often do?

**When we conform to this broken world, we contribute to the brokenness!**

Fight or flight thinking is designed to help us SURVIVE.... As we think in more ADVANCED ways.... we learn to THRIVE!

That question that the Creator asked Adam is a great question for US! "Where are YOU?"

- Have you been stepping outside of our Creator's beneficial boundaries?
- Have you been twisting words or leaving important details out?
- Are you pointing fingers at others without looking in the mirror?
- Are you trying to cover up our shame?

There's a better.... Jon Acuff offers these three steps...

**There are three steps to change your thoughts from a super problem into a superpower:**

- 1) Retire your broken soundtracks**
- 2) Replace them with new ones**
- 3) Repeat them until they're as automatic as the old ones**

And.... as a way to help you FORM THIS NEW HABIT.... *we have FREE wristbands like these available in the lobby....* as a way to remind you to use your God-given RESPONSE-ABILITIES.... to THINK in ways that are healthier and more helpful.... and to SPEAK in ways that are healthier and more helpful....

Together.... *let's build the WORLD that we want to live in!*

If you weren't here last week.... Here's our series invitation...

**Our Series invitation:**

- 1) Let's RETRAIN our brains**
- 2) Let's RECLAIM our lives**
- 3) Let's SHARE our STORIES**
- 4) Let's build an ARK**

Arks are god-sized visions.... arks take time to build.... and arks don't make sense to those who can't yet see why this work matters...

It may take 5 years.... it may take 10.... But what if God could use this Project to inspire and equip people to TEACH THESE TRUTHS in ALL 50 STATES?

That's the Vision for this Blame Less Project! More on that in the weeks ahead....

As we bring our time TODAY to a close.... I'd like to close with this illustration...

(Hold up one of my STIHL batteries) This POWER SOURCE changed my life.

I was struggling to keep my GAS lawn mower always ready when I needed it.... and GAS leaf blower always ready when I needed it.... and GAS weed trimmer always ready when I needed it.... and my GAS chainsaw always ready when I needed it...

But then.... my friends at Beisswenger's Hardware.... just down the road.... introduced me to a BETTER WAY! THESE BATTERIES!

It was a big, front-end investment.... but now I have ONE POWER SOURCE that I can use in MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS!

I can plug THIS BATTERY into my lawn mower.... and I can plug THIS SAME BATTERY into my leaf-blower.... and I can PLUG THIS SAME BATTERY into my weed trimmer.... and even plug THIS SAME BATTERY into a chain saw!

THIS ONE POWER SOURCE has LOTS OF APPLICATIONS!

And it works so well that I've become an UNPAID AMBASSADOR for this BETTER WAY!

*This battery is like your unique, human RESPONSE-ABILITY to choose HOW YOU RESPOND when you are TEMPTED TO BLAME!*

In the weeks ahead, I can't wait to show you the difference it can make to PLUG YOUR UNIQUE, GOD-GIVEN RESPONSE-ABILITY into your unique CIRCUMSTANCES your unique RELATIONSHIPS!

And.... for those of us who place our FAITH in God.... we aren't just able to bring our own, personal RESPONSE-ABILITY into those situations.... Scripture says we're able to *access the same power that raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead!*

Next week, we're going to apply this SUPERPOWER to our CIRCUMSTANCES.... For those who like to read ahead, take a look at the opening Chapters of the Book of Nehemiah.