

## **“Blaming Circumstance” The Blame Less Project, Part 3**

OK.... Let's dive into today's conversation...

A long time ago.... in a suburb far, far, away.... there lived a young boy named GEORGE. One day, little George sat in a movie theater with his eyes glued to the screen!

- His little heart pounded as the TITLE SLIDE to the latest *FLASH GORDON* episode suddenly appeared.... accompanied by DRAMATIC MUSIC
- And then.... WORDS appeared.... as if they were FLOATING IN SPACE.... and disappearing on the horizon.... as the exposition provided the BACKSTORY... for the ADVENTURE.... that he was about to be drawn in to!

And what a story it was!

Little George was captivated by the tale of a blond-haired space hero.... who was part of a great rebellion against an evil emperor!

And this episode.... was just one episode.... in a bigger saga.... of exciting wars among the stars.... with space ships... and laser swords... and laser guns.... and robots.... and characters with capes...

Does the Flash Gordon universe of the 1930's... sound at all.... like the Star Wars universe that GEORGE LUCAS introduced the world about 40 years later?

If so.... consider this quote...

**If FLASH GORDON sounds a bit like the movie [George] Lucas made, that's because IT IS the movie Lucas wanted to make.**  
**Derek Thompson** (*Hitmakers*, Page 104)

Did you know that Lucas' ORIGINAL PLAN was to make FLASH GORDON movies?

*The reason he didn't.... is because the people who HELD THOSE RIGHTS said NO!*

And in 1971.... after getting turned down.... Lucas decided.... if he couldn't own his favorite franchise.... he'd create one instead!

Lucas looked around.... and drew from the resources around him... from *Flash Gordon* films.... and *science fiction* books.... From *war movies* and *westerns*....

He remembered a hero who could channel a power called.... the source.... and he modeled another character after the hero's father.... a villain who was named Darkseid...

Several studios turned him down (*Hitmakers* 117).... But Lucas didn't give up!

And that first episode.... in the new STAR WARS franchise.... obliterated box office records!

So much so.... that within a month of the movie's release.... the stock price for its distributor.... 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.... nearly doubled!

History is filled with COUNTLESS CASE STUDIES of people.... like George... who refused to see themselves as VICTIMS OF CIRCUMSTANCE...

- Look up the backstories of ABRAHAM LINCOLN.... or CONDOLEEZZA RICE in politics
- Consider the tenacity of THOMAS EDISON when it came to his inventions
- MICHAEL JORDAN didn't make varsity when he was a Sophomore in High School.... His coach went with another kid named Leroy Smith...
- Several publishers passed on HARRY POTTER....
- Sara Blakely was *cold-selling fax machines*... before building a billion-dollar brand called Spanx....

There's even a story of members of a band called *The Who*.... telling a guitarist named *Jimmy Page* that his band would go down like "a lead balloon".... Which inspired Page to *rename* his band.... does anyone know.... LED ZEPPLIN!

And LED ZEPPLIN... ended up having more certified album sales... than *The Who*... AND... *The Rolling Stones* combined!

Again.... History is filled with COUNTLESS CASE STUDIES of people who refused to see themselves as VICTIMS OF CIRCUMSTANCE!

A few years ago.... I was introduced to a guy named Rory Vaden.... He studies successful people for a living.... Here's one of the things that he's discovered...

**It's not that successful people find it easier to do things that most people don't like doing; it's that they think differently about it . . . Success isn't a matter of circumstance; it's a matter of choice.**

**Rory Vaden** (*Take the Stairs*, Pages 9, 69)

For those of you who are just joining us.... we are in a teaching series called THE BLAME LESS PROJECT 2.0...

Last week, we took a look at how humans have a unique ability to choose our response.... This week.... we're going to *apply that* to our CIRCUMSTANCES.

Let's dive in.... and let's start with this QUESTION....

**Is blame holding you back?**

In every case study I've mentioned.... each of those people had a CHOICE.... Will I see myself as a VICTIM of my CIRCUMSTANCES.... or will I take RESPONSIBILITY for my actions?

One of the thought leaders in this area was the late Stephen Covey.... Here's just a small sampling... of what he observed... as he worked with countless people and organizations over the course of his lifetime...

**Wherever you find a problem, you will usually find the finger-pointing of blame. Society is addicted to playing the victim. "If only my boss wasn't such a controlling idiot.... If only I hadn't been born so poor.... If only I lived in a better place.... If only I hadn't inherited such a temper from my dad.... If only my kids weren't so rebellious.... If only the other department didn't mess up orders all the time.... If only we weren't in such a declining industry.... If only our people weren't so lazy and without drive.... If only my wife was more understanding.... If only.... If only."**

**Blaming everyone and everything else for our problems and challenges may be the norm and may provide temporary relief from the pain, but it also chains us to these very problems. Show me someone who is humble enough to accept and take responsibility for his or her circumstances and courageous enough to take whatever initiative is necessary to creatively work his or her way through or around these challenges, and I'll show you the supreme power of choice.**  
**Stephen Covey** (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Hardcover. Pages 16-17)

Stephen Covey... is the first person that I ever heard really break down that word RESPONSIBILITY.... into RESPONSE.... [space].... ABILITY....

Like no other mortal creatures on earth.... humans have the ABILITY to choose our RESPONSE.... INCLUDING.... when we're tempted to BLAME our CIRCUMSTANCES.

If you missed the first two weeks of this series.... we encourage you to go back and get caught up... One of the things that we've spent a lot of time talking about is how *blame usually backfires...*

Here's what that looks like when it comes to circumstances.... If you're taking notes.... I invite you to write this down...

## **Blaming circumstance**

### **1) Reinforces glass ceilings**

What's a glass ceiling? A glass ceiling is something INVISIBLE that keeps you from MOVING forward.... or upward...

What does blame do? It makes those glass ceilings EVEN THICKER!

Why?.... Because all of your energy.... gets focused on *blaming* the PROBLEM instead of *brainstorming* POSSIBILITIES! I love this quote by James Clear...

## **SLIDE**

**Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you want to become.**  
**James Clear** (*Atomic Habits*, Page 38)

BLAME... is a missed opportunity... to BECOME!

- To become a better problem-solver
- To become a more skilled-person
- To become a better bridge-builder
- To become a better teammate.... or friend.... or parent...

BLAME is also a missed opportunity.... to develop a HEALTHIER SELF-IMAGE!

As someone who is in the PEOPLE-HELPING business.... I see so many good-intentioned people actually DOING HARM by the way they TRY to make people FEEL better....

One of our deepest needs.... as people.... is to know that we're capable of doing good work.... Erik Erikson called this stage of human development INDUSTRY vs. INFERIORITY....

Blaming CIRCUMSTANCE is a VOTE.... for an INFERIOR self.... a self that is NOT capable of overcoming challenges...

And THAT is a slippery slope to SHAME....

### **Blaming circumstance**

#### **2) Is slippery slope to shame**

Shame occurs when we blur the line between what we did or didn't DO.... and who we ARE.... Once you start down that slippery slope, it can lead you to one of the darkest, most hopeless, and most isolating states there is.

What if.... instead of casting a vote for an *inferior self* that's *powerless....* or an *inferior self that's unable to overcome challenges....*

What if.... instead.... we consistently casted votes.... that are aligned with what SCRIPTURE says about us?

- That we are created in the very image of God?
- That we are fearfully and wonderfully made?
- That we are created in Christ to do GOOD WORKS.... which God prepared... in advance... for us to do (Ephesians 2:10)?

James Clear tells the story of a man who uses a wheelchair. Someone made a comment about how hard it must be to be CONFINED in that way.... Do you know how that man responded?

He replied... "I'm not CONFINED to my wheelchair---I am LIBERATED by it." (*Atomic Habits*, Page 131)

That man.... was casting a vote.... for a life that isn't DEFINED by victimhood. I encourage you to write this down...

**People who blame their *circumstances*, will never discover their *capacities*.**

Don't let BLAME hold you BACK!

Let's take a look at what's POSSIBLE when a PERSON applies these PRINCIPLES.... AND.... when they reach out to the GOD of the POSSIBLE!

If you have your Bible with you, please open with me to the Book of NEHEMIAH.... We'll start with Chapter 1, Verse 3...

Here's the backstory....

- In 586 BC, Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonian Empire and many of the survivors were carried off into captivity
- Then.... in 539 BC... Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Persians

The year is now 445 BC.... and a Jew... named NEHEMIAH... was serving in the Persian King's court...

One day, Nehemiah's brother and several companions brought Nehemiah a report of the situation in Jerusalem.... and their report wrecked him.... Nehemiah 1:3-6...

**And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."**

**Nehemiah 1:3 (ESV)**

**As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.**

**Nehemiah 1:4 (ESV)**

**And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God Who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant that I now pray before You day and night for the people of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against You. Even I and my father's house have sinned." Nehemiah 1:5-6 (ESV)**

There is a TRANSFERABLE TEMPLATE for PRAYER and RESPONSE here! Look at what Nehemiah does!

Nehemiah directs his prayers to "Yahweh, the God of heaven."

- He addresses a God Who can handle CIRCUMSTANCES that are bigger than HE is
- And this is interesting.... when I researched this Passage.... one of my sources said that the Persians had their own version of "the God of heaven"....
- Nehemiah is saying.... No.... there is only ONE GOD of heaven and HIS EAR is attentive.... and HIS EYES are open.... to those who love Him and keep His commandments...

So.... Nehemiah directs his prayers to the God of Heaven.... and did you see WHAT ELSE he did? Instead of pointing a blaming finger at God.... or the Babylonians.... or the Persians.... Nehemiah confesses how he and his people contributed to all of this!

AFTER confessing his contributions.... Nehemiah ANCHORS TO GOD'S PROMISES and shifts his focus from "What happened?" to "What can I do about it?"

Watch how Nehemiah starts with HIS response-ability... Instead of starting with "Why doesn't SOMEBODY ELSE do something?" Verses 8-11...

**"Remember the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make My name dwell there.'"**

**"They are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand."**

**"O LORD, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who delight to fear Your name, and give success to Your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Now I was cupbearer to the king.**

**Nehemiah 1:8-11 (ESV)**

Nehemiah is applying the principles that we've been talking about for the last two weeks! He's accessing higher-level THINKING.... and not only that.... *He's ALSO considering how he can access higher-level POWERS!*

The Blame CIRCUMSTANCE mindset says, "What can I do about the walls in way over THERE in Jerusalem... when I'm just a cupbearer way over HERE in Susa?"

What if.... instead of letting our blame response let us off the hook for doing nothing.... What if we considered the RESOURCES around us?

After praying and reflecting.... and anchoring to the promises of God.... Nehemiah says, "OK.... I'm a cupbearer.... here in Susa.... What RESOURCES do I have access to?"

Now.... before we start painting a picture of Nehemiah that can seem so far removed from how YOU AND I experience life.... this might help you relate to him a little better.... I know it helps me.... Let's turn to 2:2...

**Then I was very much afraid.**  
**Nehemiah 2:2 (ESV)**

THEN.... Nehemiah WAS SCARED! Nehemiah prayed for answers.... but when the time actually came for him to step up and be part of the solution.... Nehemiah was afraid!

Can anyone here relate to that? Fear can hold us back, can't it?

Here's where that fear may have come from in Nehemiah's case.... Nehemiah was about to make a big ask from the king! He was about to ask the king for permission to go and rebuild the walls.... and for the king to supply the materials!

Here's why that was a fear-inducing thing.... Archaeologists have discovered PERSIAN ART... that depicts scenes... from the Persian King's courts!

And in those art pieces, the people SURROUNDING THE KING... are sometimes portrayed... with their right hands shielding their mouths.... so they don't offend the king by saying the wrong thing!

*There might even be more to the story than that!*

It appears.... from the Biblical record itself.... that *King Artaxerxes* is the one who shut down the most recent attempt to rebuild the walls (Ezra 4:7-23). Nehemiah was about to say, "Hey king.... YOU made a mistake.... Let ME go and do... what YOU said shouldn't be done!"

And here's ANOTHER reason to be afraid.... Right around THAT TIME a revolt broke out in Egypt that took five years to put down.... and there was trouble in the northern regions as well.... This could have been a situation where Nehemiah was concerned that his desire to go and rebuild the walls would be met with, "Hey... I need you here..."

Let me give you one more.... Maybe Nehemiah's fear had less to do with the KING and more to do with his own insecurities.... He would have to leave a GREAT JOB that he was GREAT AT.... to do something he'd never done before.... that had a high risk of failure!

*Maybe it was a combination of ALL THOSE THINGS.... We don't know for sure.... Again.... What we DO know is that Nehemiah was SCARED...*

I once read about a woman who was on the 80<sup>th</sup> floor when a FIRE broke out in one of the floors below her.

When the fire alarm went off, she was paralyzed by the FEAR of getting trapped in the stairwell!

When one of the firefighters found her and tried to lead her to the stairs.... She stared pushing him away and screaming, "No! I'm scared! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

And the firefighter looked her in the eye and said, "That's OK, DO IT SCARED."

And he led her to safety.... one step at a time... saying, "It's OK.... do it scared.... It's OK.... do it scared..." all the way to the bottom...

Nehemiah was scared.... But he made a decision to "do it scared" .... Nehemiah 2:3...

**I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”**

**Nehemiah 2:3 (ESV)**

It's important to note here that Nehemiah had *earned the respect of the king BEFORE he had this conversation....*

What was Nehemiah's job? He was the cupbearer. He had direct access to the king and the king trusted Nehemiah with his very life. You don't rise to that position without earning tremendous respect along the way!

And we can see from the words he chooses that Nehemiah understood *timing* and *tact....* All of that is so important.... But here's what I believe made the biggest difference of all....

And here's another thing that separated Nehemiah from others.... Anyone can point out a problem.... Nehemiah was PRAYED UP and he had a GOD-BREATHED PROPOSAL.... 2:4-5...

**Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king . . .**

**Nehemiah 2:4-5a (ESV)**

Remember.... Nehemiah had been laying a FOUNDATION of prayer and fasting.... possibly FOR MONTHS.... The God of the Possible had prepared the way and.... in HIS timing.... had opened the door...

Nehemiah took a deep breath.... said ANOTHER PRAYER.... And he shared his PLAN with the king...

That PRAYER PIECE is a theme that keeps coming up over and over and over again in Nehemiah... (4:4; 4:9; 5:19; 6:9; 6:14; 13:14)...

Somewhere along the line, Nehemiah had TRAINED HIS BRAIN to go to PRAYER!

*As you and I learn to do THAT.... our RESPONSE-ABILITY won't be limited to our PERSONAL CAPACITY!*

Do we have a role to play in all of this? Absolutely!

One of my all-time favorite Bible Verses comes from Nehemiah.... When the king said yes and they started rebuilding Jerusalem's walls.... they faced REAL THREATS from their neighbors.... And here's what Nehemiah and his team did...

**We prayed.... and we posted a guard....**

**Nehemiah 4:9**

What might be possible if YOU did the same? If you PRAYED.... and.... as God provided a plan and an opportunity.... you took your next step in faith?

Here's something I hope everyone takes away from our time together...

**We're more RESPONSE-ABLE and RESOURCE-FULL than most people REAL-IZE.**

You have a RESPONSE-ABILITY that that was given to you by God Himself.... We also have access also almost unlimited RESOURCES that can be REAL-IZED as we invite Yahweh, the God of heaven, to align our will with His!

There are a lot of songs out there about OVERCOMING.... We sing a bunch of them.... Today, I'm going to challenge you to take a step towards REAL-IZING what you've been singing about!

If you're facing something that's between YOU and something God desires FOR YOU.... or desires to do THROUGH YOU...

**The God of the possible invites us to find a fix**

Last week, we compared our RESPONSE-ABILITY to a POWERFUL LITHIUM BATTERY that can power a lawn mower.... or a leaf blower.... or a weed trimmer.... or a chainsaw...

You can use that SAME POWER SOURCE for different applications...

We also said that there's a BIG FRONT-END INVESTMENT.... but it's worth it!

There are some OUTSTANDING RESOURCES out there when it comes to retraining your brain when it comes to CIRCUMSTANCES.... and developing new habits and skills so that you can apply your RESPONSE-ABILITY SUPERPOWER to the challenges you face or God-honoring goals that you set!

Here's the Master Class Bundle.... and the order... that I recommend...

- *Take the Stairs* by Rory Vaden – It's a quick read and very good at providing motivation
- *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey – Is outstanding at laying out the principles
- And *Atomic Habits* by James Clear is the best resource I know of when it comes to how to you live this out.... one small step at a time

Before this series is over.... I'll send out an ECC-mail that lists all of the resources that I'll recommend in this series.... You can use your RESPONSE-ABILITY right now to sign up for those E-mail updates at Emmanuel.Church/Next.

Is this a *big front-end investment*? Yes!

Is it *worth it*? Yes!

Now.... Do you have to finish all the books.... and spend months praying and fasting like Nehemiah did *before you can get started?* NO!!!!

You can apply this TODAY! Let me give you a START SMALL example....

- One day I needed some cold medicine, so I dropped by Walgreens on my way home
- I don't go to Walgreens to browse.... I don't go to Walgreens to stock up...
- I go to Walgreens to get the 1-2 things I need and get out...
- I walk in and I notice there's a long line at the checkout.... Someone was had a coupon or something that wasn't working...
- And there was a frustrated customer at the checkout.... a bunch of very agitated looking customers lined up after her....
- And a very stressed out looking teenage employee announcing over the Walgreen's PA, "Josh to the front please.... Josh to the front..."

It took me about one minute to find what I was looking for....

- On the way there I heard, "Josh to the front please.... Josh to the front..."
- And on the way back I heard, "Josh to the front please.... Josh to the front..."

I get back to the front.... and now the line is LONGER.... And the customer with the coupon looks even MORE FRUSTRATED.... and the line of customers behind her look even MORE AGITATED.... and the teenage employee looks even MORE STRESSED as she says, "Josh to the front please.... Josh to the front..."

Now.... I have a CHOICE to make.... I can get in that line and start blaming everyone in it.... I can BLAME the teenage employee.... or BLAME the lady with the coupon.... or BLAME Josh.... or BLAME Walgreens.... or BLAME them all...

BUT.... I had this handy little bracelet reminding me of a SUPERPOWER that we POSSESS as PEOPLE called RESPONSE-ABILITY!

*And I can plug it into this situation!*

I had all kinds of options.... I could choose to wait in line and catch up on emails.... I could choose to go across the street to Kowalski's.... OR.... I could go back to the back and ask if I can make my transaction at the Pharmacy!

I decided to go with that option.... NOW SMILING.... and I may have even been whistling a merry tune... as I heard "Josh to the front please.... Josh to the front..." about 3 more times...

And on my way out.... I realized this little secret might help others too.... and I passed along a little life hack that didn't just help me.... it helped some other folks as well...

One of the things that James Clear reminds us in his book is this.... If you want to change directions.... find people who are going that same way....

I have one last thing that I encourage you to write down and this is it...

**It's even better when we blame less together**

We did a version of this series in January of 2020.... Right before the pandemic.... and we had the opportunity to APPLY these principles in REAL TIME!

When church gatherings were shut down.... we took our cues from Nehemiah.... we literally called our leaders together.... right here in THIS ROOM.... one last time.... and we spaced out.... with at least 6 feet between us.... we PRAYED... AND.... we invited the God of the Possible to bless us.... and protect us.... and guide our next steps!

As we used our RESPONSE-ABILITY... we discovered that God already had a lot of RESOURCES already in place.... and we also had a lot of potential skills that we could develop along the way!

We started FILMING SERVICES in the basement of our church office.... and then at Rice Creek Covenant.... and then in Scott Reed's workshop.... and.... before the Pandemic was over.... we had this Studio!

When we were able to gather OUTDOORS.... We REAL-IZED that God had already provided the best OUTDOOR VENUE in the Northeast Suburbs.... and we ALSO realized there were a lot of FOOD TRUCKS that had nowhere to go.... and OUTDOOR SERVICES became not only a stop-gap.... But a new tradition!

When almost everyone began canceling their contracts with COVENANT PINES CAMP.... we doubled down! We blessed the camp.... and we created life-long memories.... as we figured out how to do a Fall Retreat.... in a Pandemic.... in the biggest recorded snowstorm... that Minnesota has ever had... that early in the Fall!

Every one of these challenges strengthened our FAITH.... that.... if God's in it.... we can figure it out TOGETHER...

Like the time when the coldest weather in 30 years descended on Covenant Pines right when we were heading north for SNOW CAMP.... It was so cold that they canceled INDOOR basketball at the nearest town.... It was warmer in Alaska.... and Antarctica that weekend.... We checked! But we geared up.... We kept moving.... And we had great time!

Now.... when we meet a challenge like this year's Fall Retreat.... when rain had turned the Rec Field into a swamp.... We met that challenge head on.... Instead of blaming the weather and canceling our game.... our "BATTLE OF THE BOG" will go down in history as the most epic version of Four-Way-Capture the Stuff that the world has ever seen!

*The BLAME IMPULSE can hold you captive in a PRISON with UNLOCKED DOORS.... Today.... we invite you to join those of us who are discovering a BETTER WAY...*

If God can use an exiled cupbearer in Susa to rebuild walls in Jerusalem...

If Jesus can use a kid with 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed more than 5000 people...

What might the Holy Spirit empower YOU to do in the days.... weeks.... and years ahead if you surrender your life.... right now.... to the God of the Possible....

Let me close this teaching with a quote and a prayer.... and then let's seal our time together with a time of Holy Communion...

**The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people and they take themselves out of the slums . . . The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.**

**Ezra Taft Benson** (As quoted in *7 Habits*, Page 320)