

“Unfinished Business” The Blame Less Project, Part 5

A few years ago, Laura and I were flying down to florida.

I had just placed my bag in the overhead compartment. I had just stowed my tray table in the upright position. I fastened my safety belt. I settled in into my seat.... and...

I pulled out this book....

As I did, the guy to my left asked the question.... “What are you reading?”

HE didn’t know that was a LOADED question and I purposely decided NOT to UNLOAD on him. So I gave him the kind of answer that would give him a chance to either CLOSE THE DOOR on this conversation.... or KEEP GOING...

I simply said, “It’s called The Tipping Point”....

“What’s it about?” he replied.

“Hmmm....” I thought to myself.... “As a church we just talked about how this is an idea that others need to heart about. But I’ll give him one more chance to close the door on this conversation.... because he’s about to open a floodgate!”

And I simply said, “This book is about how... an idea or trend or behavior can spread.”

And without even pausing for a second.... the guy.... looks me right in the eye.... and says, “What idea, trend, or behavior do YOU want to spread?”

Taking a cue from Nehemiah.... I shot up a silent flare prayer.... closed the book... and I said....

“For about a year.... I’ve been thinking a lot about blame.”

And here’s how the rest of that conversation played out.... Not word-for-word.... but here’s the GIST....

I started with this.... and I invite you to write this down as WE get started as well...
“Blame is a really, really big deal.”

Blame is a really, really big deal

1) Blame is everywhere

“Blame is everywhere....” I pointed out.... “And here’s what I discovered as I began to try to understand blame at a deeper level...”

2) Blame goes back to the beginning

“People who believe we EVOLVED.... AND.... people who take the Bible literally.... BOTH AGREE that BLAME goes back to the dawn of humanity.”

“This is interesting,” he said, “Go on...”

“Humans have two deep, primal needs,” I continued, “The need to feel good about ourselves.... and the need to feel loved and accepted by others.”

“Our brains are constantly assessing our world... for situations that appear to threaten those two things and that’s all happening.... faster than the speed of thought... in an area of our brain.... that some people call the monkey part.” And...

3) The primal, instinctual centers of your brain are trying to help

“When our monkey brain... senses... that our self image or social status is being threatened.... our brain triggers the same, physical response that it does when we’re physically attacked.... And can you see why that’s a problem?”

“Absolutely!” he said....

4) Attack, defend, or deflect aren’t always our best options

“That’s right!” I replied.... At this point he’s not only agreeing *with me*.... He’s making the case *for me*.... Saying things like, “I see this all the time!”

And as he starts telling me stories.... his partner is nodding along too...

“Keep going...” he said.... So I did.... And I shared with him what we shared with you about how blame holds us back when it comes to circumstance....

Blaming circumstance holds us back

- 1) Blame reinforces glass ceilings**
- 2) Blame keeps people from discovering their capacities**
- 3) Blame is slippery slope to shame**
- 4) Blame makes it harder to find a fix**

As we talked about blaming circumstance.... He shared examples... of the difference it makes if you see yourself as a victim.. or... if you take responsibilities for your own actions....

He got especially passionate when we were talking about same.... and he unloaded on all those RELIGIOUS PEOPLE.... and how.... in his mind... RELIGION is all about SHAME....

“By the way,” he asked, “I never asked what you do.”

I looked at him, smiled, and said, “I’m a pastor.”

And his partner just looked down and did her best to swallow her laugh.... It was clear that this wasn't the first time that her partner's mouth had gotten him in trouble!

After apologizing he said.... "Go on..."

And I shared with him what we shared with you about how...

Blaming others creates a battlefield

- **Blame turns potential allies into adversaries**
- **Blame triggers the triangle trap**
- **Blame is a slippery slope to scapegoating**
- **Blame makes it harder to find a fix**

He resonated deeply with all of this too.... Especially when it came to politics and toxic work environments!

And this is where I paused to add something that I think it's worth writing down....

this isn't the blame never project!

"I'm so glad you said that!" he said.... "If this airline had three of their planes crash three weeks in a row, I would want to know WHY!"

"Me too!" I replied.... And we had a great conversation about how you can't have real community without real accountability!"

And we talked about how *blaming less* actually helps you *blame better*.

And that naturally transitioned into a conversation about what *The Blame Less Project* is.... and what we're trying to do.... I said...

Humans have a unique response-ability

- **We can embrace that space between stimulus and response**
- **We can literally renew our minds**
- **Our words create worlds**
- **The Blame Less Project is about creating the world we all want to live in**

And I told him the story of how.... when I went looking online... for resources designed to help people BLAME [space] LESS.... I was caught by surprise....

When I typed in BLAME [SPACE] LESS on Google... it kept redirecting me.... to blameless.... one word....

- There were more than 12.5 million links to the word BLAMELESS
- There were more than 300 million links when I typed in the words NEVER BLAME

But.... according to Google.... Blame [space] Less wasn't a thing...

I said, “You asked me why I’m reading *The Tipping Point*.... If enough people are open... to the conversation that *we’re having right now*.... it could be a GAME CHANGER.... for individuals.... for couples.... for families.... for teams.... for businesses.... for non-profits.... for our nation...”

“That’s right” he said.... “It could...”

So I got more specific.... “We’re setting out to create something that could be really, really HELPFUL.... *but doesn’t yet exist*... Here’s what we’re setting out to do...”

The Blame Less Project

- **A new, non-profit that inspires and equips people to blame less**
- **Not never, just less**

We’ll create a hub @ TheBlameLessProject.org

- **Master class coaching**
- **Curated resources**
- **Support and inspiration**

Over the course of that conversation.... with a complete stranger.... it was clear that we saw a LOT of things differently.... We didn’t watch the SAME SHOWS.... We didn’t VOTE for the same candidates.... We didn’t believe the same things about GOD....

He shared how he and his partner love to vacation with other NUDISTS.... That is NOT how Laura and I choose to vacation...

We were very, very different people.... BUT.... when it comes to BELIEVING... that our world would be BETTER... if more people would BLAME LESS.... we shared a LOT of common ground!

EXCEPT... FOR... THIS...

As the flight attendants got in place to prepare us for take-off... he said, “Here’s the problem with what you’re trying to do...”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“You can’t change people.”

And.... I could read.... from his body language.... that he had just closed the door on the idea.... that we can make a difference...

He wasn’t ready to go... where we’re going to go together today...

What he said was true.... to an extent.... We can’t change people....

But.... can people.... be inspired and equipped to change? Yes!

Have any of YOU ever had a teacher.... or coach.... or friend.... or parent.... or brother or sister.... or co-worker or supervisor.... or an author or an influencer.... who inspired or equipped you to take a step forward?

Do any of you believe in a God.... Who transforms hearts and minds?

OK.... if want to live in a world where *more people.... blame less....* here's our challenge going forward....

How do we INSPIRE and EQUIP people to blame less?

What we're setting out to do won't be easy.... What we're setting out to do will take time....

We're going to face an uphill battle against our own biology that tempts us to blame without thinking....

Many of us face an uphill battle against our upbringing.... Those who raised us may have modeled blaming behaviors...

We live in a *blame culture*.... where most people don't realize what a big deal blame is....

There will be people who will accuse us of gaslighting.... or siding with the enemy...

We face algorithms designed to turn us against one another.... and the motivation of higher ratings and higher profits for those who take the low road...

Can we come up with a MILLION REASONS why we should just CLOSE THE DOOR on this series.... and simply move on to the next one?

Yes.... but.... WHAT IF.... this is an IDEA whose time has come.... and WHAT IF.... we've been given the opportunity to STEWARD it?

Last week I invited you to take a look at the Old Testament Book of Esther.... I hope you did.... because just about every principle that we've discussed over the course of this series is in there!

For those of you who are in a Small Church.... I think it would be valuable to go through Esther and point out Blame Less principles! When people followed them, when they didn't, and the difference it made!

With the limited time we have this morning.... I'd like to draw your attention to just a few Verses from this remarkable Book!

If you have your Bible with you, turn with me to the Old Testament Book of Esther....

Let's draw hope and inspiration.... from what looks like an impossible challenge....

Here's the context...

- the bible contains poems and parables.... it also contains historical events.... this is one of those historical events....
- It's a true story that opens... with the powerful King Xerxes.... of the Persian empire.... maybe you've heard of him...
- It opens with King Xerxes making an example of his wife.... His queen doesn't do exactly what he thinks she should do.... and he uses that moment to send a message to every man and woman in the kingdom.... that wives should always submit to their husbands.... or else!

At the complete opposite end of the power scale from King Xerxes.... was a young girl.... named Hadassah.... who was also known as Esther....

She was a Jewish orphan... living in an occupied land.... who was taken in and cared for by her cousin... Mordecai.

Through a series of events... Esther became Xerxes new Queen.... I don't think Esther would have chosen that path on her own.... But through it all we see that Esther never presents as a VICTIM... and the Hand of God is moving chess pieces like only He can!

For example.... Let's turn to Esther 2:22-23.... One day Mordecai overhears a plot to assassinate Esther's husband.... the King.... and here's what happens...

**And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.
Esther 2:22-23 (ESV)**

Here's an example of someone blaming well! An accusation is made.... AND.... actual evidence is weighed before a verdict is rendered.... Gold Star for Mordecai!

And his good deed gets recorded.... But the King never does anything special to honor Mordecai for saving his life.... We'll come back to this.... That's one of the chess pieces that God is moving around the board...

Sometimes we blame God for things that we thank Him for later!

Shortly after saving the king.... Mordecai finds himself in the crosshairs of a rising star in the King's Court.... a real enemy....

Blame Less principles can save you... from turning potential allies into adversaries!
AND.... blame less principles can ALSO help you... identify... when a threat is REAL!

Haman.... that rising star in King Xerxes court.... was a real threat.... and not only to Mordecai.... and his cousin Esther.... Haman was plotting genocide against the Jewish people!

Let's turn to Esther 3:5-6...

**And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom.
Esther 3:5-6**

Now let's jump to Verse 13...

**Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.
Esther 3:13**

I think it's important to mention that Esther wasn't originally going to be the Text that we looked at today.... The original plan was to open to Galatians 6.... Where it says, "We will reap a harvest if we don't give up!"

But I was praying.... and I was sensing that we were supposed to open to Esther.... and perhaps this is one of the reasons why.... For this reminder that the Jewish people have been enslaved.... and targeted for annihilation.... in a way... that most people groups... can't identify with.

Let's be very, very careful.... when we're tempted to SAY and POST things.... that oversimplify.... and dehumanize.... Things that make it appear as though everyone living in Israel.... or everyone living in Gaza.... is either to *blame* or is *blameless*!

Scripture reminds us.... in James, Chapter 1.... Brothers and sisters.... let's be quick to listen.... and slow to speak.... human anger doesn't produce the righteousness that God desires...

When we just add to the noise.... When our words just throw more gasoline on the fire.... It gets harder and harder to identify who the real enemies are.... and also to identify those who share the same, core values that WE do!

HISTORY shows us.... time and time again.... that there ARE people.... who want to annihilate others.... Let's not make it harder than it already is.... to identify who the real enemies are...

People who want to cause harm thrive when there's lots of chaos and conflict and confusion....

This world needs more people who are inspired and equipped with the kind of principles that we've been talking about in this series...

Let's go back to the Text...

Mordecai got word to Esther.... that there was a REAL plot to annihilate all of the Jews.... and Esther replied, “What can I do? If I go to the King... without him calling for me first.... and he’s not OK with that... “there is but one law—to be put to death”....

Here’s how Mordecai replies.... These are among the best-known words in the Old Testament....

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom *for such a time as this?*

Esther 4:14

Consider the FAITH.... and the courage... that we see in Esther’s reply...

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”

Esther 4:15-16

Does this story end in the death of Esther.... and Mordecai.... and their people? No!

Like Nehemiah.... there was a period of FASTING.... and wise PLANNING.... and the One Who has EVERY RESOURCE at His disposal continued to move the CHESS PIECES around...

Haman’s plan BACKFIRED.... as HIS KIND of BLAME usually does!

Remember how Mordecai’s actions were written down, but HE was never honored?

- Guess what was read to the King one night when he couldn’t sleep? Those words!
- Guess who the King chose to honor Mordecai? Haman!
- Guess who was executed on the spot where Haman planned to execute Mordecai? Haman again!
- And guess who WASN’T annihilated? Esther and her people

Victor Hugo once said this...

No force on earth can stop an idea whose time has come.

Victor Hugo

If you’re taking notes.... I encourage you to write this down...

The Blame Less Project is an idea whose time has come

My friends.... we’ve given a chance to do something really, really special.

We had a strong sense.... back in January 2020.... that this IDEA wasn’t just for us!

And NOW...

- God has blessed us with CAPACITIES that we didn't have back then.... Like a studio!
- God has drawn PEOPLE to our church who have skills and experience in creating curriculum.... and podcasting.... and writing books.... and raising funds....
- PEOPLE who have influence with other people who are uniquely positioned to help us move this movement forward...

AND.... those of us who keep our fingers on the pulse of our culture can sense that there is a groundswell... of people... who are primed to hear the KIND OF CONTENT... that we can provide!

Can't you just sense... that more and more people are growing more and more frustrated by all blaming.... and polarization.... that we see everywhere?

Do you notice... how more and more whistleblowers... are going public about algorithms and influencers and politicians that are BENEFITING from BLAME?

There will always be people who will accuse us of gaslighting.... and not being sensitive enough.... But if we would have tried to MAINSTREAM this SAME MESSAGE in the spring and summer of 2020.... Those headwinds would have extinguished any flames we had started to fan!

These days I am feeling a sense of urgency.... and several times I've felt a version of Mordecai's words to Esther.... *"If Emmanuel's not going to run with this.... I'll find someone who will."*

This is OUR TIME.... together.... let's build something really, really special...

Over the next year.... we're going to begin filming a SEVEN PART SERIES.... And we'll design the content in such a way that it can be used in any setting.... You could use them in family counseling situations.... with a sports team.... at work....

Here they are...

The Blame Less Course

- **Part 1: Blame [Space] Less**
- **Part 2: The Genesis of Blame**
- **Part 3: Blaming Circumstance**
- **Part 4: Blaming Others**
- **Part 5: Shame and Scapegoating**
- **Part 6: The Blame Less Revolution**
- **Part 7: The Blameless Revolutionary**

We'll have subtitles for each title.... and the subtitle for Part 7 will be something like "Bonus Content for the Curious".... and that's where we'll share our invitation to take a closer look at the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus.... and we'll do our best to introduce our friends to the Scriptures that we've anchored to along the way...

- Paul's Letter to the Romans.... and what Paul says about the "renewing of our mind"

- And a closer look at the God of Genesis.... and His love.... and grace.... and the foreshadowing of the Savior
- And how Nehemiah was able to access power beyond his own
- And the vision that Jesus cast for a new kind of community
- And how Jesus' Own sacrifice as Someone Who was Blameless [one word].... inspires us to extend His grace to ourselves and others...
- And what God did through a young, orphaned, girl... in an occupied land... named Esther who recognized that she was uniquely positioned for such a time as this...

Through that Course.... and other resources.... here's what we see...

Our vision is to inspire and equip blame less ambassadors in every state and a growing number of sectors

To be clear.... ambassadors won't be part of some kind of paid, pyramid scheme.... Just people who have PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED the difference this has made in their own lives.... and people who believe that we CAN inspire and equip others!

WHY did we choose the term "ambassador"?

- Ambassadors are representatives from a different kingdom and culture
- And that's what it feels like when you learn to blame less

How will one become an ambassador?

Blame Less Ambassadors

- **Complete the Course**
- **Live the Lessons**
- **Share their Stories**

We want all of that to be FREE!

Just so you know.... this is happening!

It's been SO encouraging to see how God has been blessing this idea so far.... By God's grace.... The Blame Less Project is gaining traction!

We've been BUSY and we have unfinished BUSINESS

We've come a long way since 2020.... Here's a quick summary of where we're at.... what's next.... and how you can help.... Let's start with where we're at...

We've been busy

- **Pastor Chris spent time in personal prayer and discernment**
- **He consulted with trusted specialists and advisors who call Emmanuel home**
- **A proposal for a new, non-profit was vetted through our Staff, Elders, Pastoral Relations Committee, and Nominating Committee**
- **The Elders affirmed that a new, tax-exempt, 501c3 would reach a wider audience (and open new resource and revenue streams for ECC)**

We've been busy

- **We hosted a Town Hall Meeting for members to learn more and offer feedback**
- **We assembled a Board and created a new non-profit**
- **We filed Articles of Incorporation and approved Bylaws**
- **We filed for and obtained 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status**

We've been busy

- **We crafted a covenant between Emmanuel and The Blame Less Project**
- **We secured domains, handles, and trademarks**
- **We created a logo and developed a landing page**
- **God provided a Social Media and Project Management specialist**
- **We reintroduced a 2.0 version of to the ECC family**

That represents a LOT of work!

That's where we're at.... where's where we're headed...

We have unfinished business

- **Build and strengthen Teams / Beginning with a Prayer Team**
- **Increase capacities and competencies**
- **Create helpful, engaging content that people will want to share---inviting feedback from multiple perspectives along the way**

We have unfinished business

- **Continue to learn, discern, and sharpen our vision**
- **Refine our public roll-out plan**
- **Secure funding and resources**
- **Build the website and create templates for e-blasts and socials**
- **Begin posting socials and shorts**
- **Create and film the Course**
- **And more!**

As we get ready for the long road ahead.... Remember.... Emmanuel itself was still only an IDEA back in 2007....

But it was an IDEA whose time had come!

And God was in it.... And God drew YOU into it.... The Blame Less Project is just one more example of something that God is bringing to life through us!

And it has the potential to impact GENERATIONS to come!

So.... if you're here in person.... grab a wristband.... and a few extras... and pick up a sticker.... and a few extras...

AND... you would like to be part of this.... or just stay in the loop.... here's how you can help!

You can help by

- **STARTING** your ambassador training now!
- **SHARING** your blame less stories
- **SIGNING** up to get looped in this spring (theblamelessproject.org)
- **PRAYING** for inspiration, influencers, investors and your own involvement

LET'S DO THAT RIGHT NOW...