

The Discipleship Project-Summer 2021

Series 1: Who's to Blame

A Study by Eugene Wilson

Blaming Family

Series Big Idea

Because Jesus Christ took our blame through His death on the cross, we must assume responsibility for our own choices and trust in His grace and mercy.

Lesson Big Idea

Because Jesus Christ took our blame, we must assume responsibility for our own choices and refuse to blame our heritage for our disobedience.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: Genesis 3:12 (PPT)

Having been raised by hippy parents in a drug-infected environment, the possibility of obtaining success in life was minimal at best. Liz, however, beat the odds. Robert Petterson, in *The One Year Book of Amazing Stories*, tells the story.

While their kids starved, the couple [Liz's parents] spent welfare checks on cocaine and heroin. When cupboards were empty, the girls sucked on ice cubes. One night they divided a tube of toothpaste for dinner. Liz remembers her mother stealing money for her birthday gift and selling the television set and a Thanksgiving turkey to buy a hit of coke. She recalls going to school lice ridden, scruffy, and smelly. When the other kids began to bully her, she dropped out. While her parents slept away their days in a drug-induced stupor, she was a wild child on the mean streets of New York City. Her mother often said, "One day life is going to be better." But Liz can't remember how many days she nursed her mother in that lice-filled, run-down flat. She does remember the day her mom told her that she had tested HIV positive and had AIDS. Soon after, her mom died and was buried in a donated wooden box. When her dad couldn't pay the rent and moved into a homeless shelter, Liz was out on the streets. She fed herself by shoplifting food. She also stole self-help books that sparked dreams. She remembered how often her mother had said, "One day I'll fix my life." So she decided to fix hers.

And fix it she did. Her story, however, is an anomaly. The majority, given like circumstances, do not rise above the challenges. Most allow such family dynamics to limit their potential. We will see, however, that although this is often the case, it does not have to be this way. Regardless of the challenges we might encounter with our family dynamics, we can rise above. We can be all God wants us to be.

FRAME

To reach our full potential, we must cease blaming our family. Consider the following story, found in the Bible. This is a story of a mess up, a major blunder, and yet a story of hope.

We can identify the precise moment when everything fell apart. Until that fateful instant, everything was perfect. It was paradise in every way. The Garden was created by God; the Bible says it consisted of “every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food” (Genesis 2:9, KJV). This was the land where the first man and woman lived—a paradise unlike anything humanity has since experienced, without thorn and thistle, without storm or destruction of any kind. Indeed, it was paradise.

It all ended, however, that fateful day. Paradise—that perfect place with the perfect man and woman, with the perfect job and perfect environment—would be no more. God, the Creator of the Garden, had specified that they should not eat of one particular tree, the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17, KJV). Of all other trees, they could eat freely, as they so desired. Only of this tree were they not to partake.

The story of the fall of humanity is commonly known. (PPT) Eve ate of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and gave some fruit to Adam, who also ate of it. Consequently, Adam and Eve were banished from living in the Garden. In contrast to a life of tranquility, living outside of Paradise proved to be quite harsh. Such was the result of Adam and Eve’s sin.

But that is not all. As tragic as it was for Adam and Eve, all humanity was negatively impacted. “By one man,” Paul wrote in Romans 5:12, “sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (KJV). Hence, thousands of years later, humanity bears the marks of Adam and Eve’s decision to partake of the forbidden fruit. **That fateful moment when the first man and woman ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has affected all our lives. (PPT)**

- **How has the Fall affected all of us today?**

We must be careful, however, not to do as Adam and Eve did. To follow suit would be to lessen our chances of breaking free—of obtaining the fulfillment of God’s plan and purpose for our lives. **Not only must we strive to live a life of obedience, but we must refrain from doing what Adam and Eve did after they had eaten of the fruit. (PPT)** When asked, “Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” Adam replied, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” The Lord then said to Eve, “What is this that thou hast done?” She replied, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:11–13, KJV).

Adam and Eve did not lie to God about what they did. They did, however, fail to take responsibility for it. Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent. Amusingly, not only did Adam blame Eve, but he also indirectly blamed God. Adam reminded God that He was the one who gave Adam the woman in the first place.

- **Are you more likely to blame others for the way things are or take personal responsibility? Why do you think you lean one way or the other?**

Adam and Eve blaming each other offers us a lesson on what we should not do. **Both Adam and Eve sought to blame someone else. (PPT)** They wanted to be the victims of someone else’s wrongdoing as opposed to accepting responsibility for their own actions. At the root, deflecting responsibility was a blatant attempt to ignore their need to acknowledge their disobedience to God.

Blaming, it has been said, is the fine art of making others responsible for all the difficult things that happen to us. (PPT) Indeed, it appears humanity has refined what Adam and Eve started. Not only are we good at deflecting responsibility by blaming others, but our society offers support for it.

At some point, we have all done it, and it is highly likely we still do it. We blame others because we live in an environment where it is accepted. **We blame others because Adam and Eve did it; we do it because it is in our DNA. (PPT)** Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. And we blame _____; you fill in the blank.

Adam and Eve’s decision to partake of that which was forbidden impacted their lives in a major way and also had an enormous impact on the lives of their children. Instead of growing up in Paradise, Adam and Eve’s children grew up in a harsh environment. Instead of harmony, life was filled with fragmentation.

And so it is today. In many ways we have all been impacted by our families. Negative generational patterns—cycles of destructive behavior and ways of thinking—are passed from one generation to another. Moms and dads are affected by what their moms and dads did; then those moms and dads negatively affect the next generation. And so it goes, on and on.

- **What is something you want to do or achieve, but your family dynamics might be holding you back?**

But it does not have to be that way. Generational patterns can be broken. For this to happen, we must first cease blaming the previous generation. We must stop blaming our momma and stop blaming our daddy. We must stop blaming our grandpa and grandma. We must stop blaming our spouse. The blame game does not help us move forward and break negative patterns. It does not help us move beyond repeating what the previous generations did. The blame game is counterproductive to what God wants us to do in our lives.

Why are we so quick to blame someone else? Why do we not readily accept responsibility? Why are we so quick to pass the buck? **There are a few reasons why we are so quick to play the blame game. (PPT)**

First, **blaming others is easy. (PPT)** When we hold ourselves accountable, it means we are responsible, and with responsibility comes work. Blaming someone else is easier than working on ourselves. Working on ourselves is hard.

Second, **blaming others is a defensive maneuver. (PPT)** We resist the notion we are responsible for the pain we have caused because to do so would be to heap more pain on ourselves. We do not want to feel guilty, experience anxiety, and endure stress. Or perhaps we do not think we could handle such things. So rather than accept responsibility, we pass it on to someone else.

Third, **blaming others protects our self-righteousness; it makes us feel important. (PPT)** When we blame others, it makes us feel as though we are the good person. The other person is the bad person, not me, we may think. Admitting we are responsible means we are no longer justified in our erroneous thoughts and behaviors. We may no longer say, “I was right; they were wrong.”

Fourth, **blaming others means we do not have to deal with confrontation. (PPT)** Many people dislike confrontation, especially with those who blame a lot. Learning how and when to confront others requires embracing personal growth. And, as previously noted, personal growth requires work. Just blaming others is much easier.

- **Do you struggle with confrontation? Why or why not?**

Last, when we blame someone else, we generate sympathy from others, thereby reinforcing the belief that we are not to be blamed. **Hence, blaming others makes us feel good. (PPT)**

No doubt there are many reasons people blame others rather than accepting personal responsibility. These are just a few common reasons. We must move forward, but we cannot move forward if we are blaming others.

We must note there are some who have experienced pain—emotional, mental, and even physical—which they did not cause. Some were children when things happened to them—things outside of their ability to stop. But—and this is where we must be careful—as adults we cannot blame others for the reasons we are hurting others, hurting ourselves, or sabotaging our own relationships. However, that is what most people do. The truth is: hurt people hurt people.

To break the cycle, we must take responsibility for the decisions we make. (PPT) As parenting columnist John Rosemond maintains, “Taking responsibility for something and self-blame are horses of two entirely different colors. The former is empowering; the latter is paralyzing.”

If we do not end the blame game, we stand to lose some things, some very important things. And that is our fault, not someone else’s. **There are a few things we might lose if we do not end the blame game. (PPT)**

We will lose healthy relationships. (PPT) Blaming others is a form of putting others down. This destroys relationships. It does not build them up. Blaming others and healthy communication are contrary to each other. In order for relationships to thrive, they require healthy communication. Hence, blaming others must go. It cannot remain. If we continue to blame others, we will lose all ability to achieve healthy relationships.

If we blame others, **we will lose the ability to influence others positively.** (PPT) Trust is the foundation to healthy relationships, and healthy relationships are built on good communication. If we blame others, we are resorting to the poorest of communication patterns, eroding trust. Once trust is gone, we have lost our ability to influence in a positive manner. This is why some parents lose their ability to influence their children in a positive manner. Blaming others is destructive. It destroys relationships between friends, between spouses, and between parents and children.

Perhaps most importantly, when we blame others, **we lose the power to change.** (PPT) Blaming others renders us powerless. That is what happened to Adam. Because he failed to take responsibility for what he had done, he lost his power to change. He said, "It was Eve's fault." And if it was Eve's fault, then Adam held no responsibility or power to do anything about it.

Considering all we lose when we blame others, why do we continue to blame people? Ultimately, blaming others is about a diversion. It is about diverting attention away from what we have done. That is why Adam blamed Eve. He was embarrassed. He felt guilty, so he sought to place attention on Eve rather than on himself.

- **Have you ever blamed someone for something that was really your fault? Explain.**

That is why we blame others. Ultimately, we do not want the attention on ourselves. We do not want to take responsibility for our own failures, our own shortcomings, or our own issues. **Blaming others diverts attention away from us and helps us to avoid responsibility.** (PPT) But by making everyone else responsible, we become powerless. If everyone else is at fault, and we do not bear any responsibility for what we did, then we do not have the power to change anything. We have become powerless.

So let us suppose we grew up in a home like Liz with abusive parents, alcohol, drugs, poverty, and homelessness. Let us also add a few more things, because we do not know what all Liz might have experienced. Let us add "beaten," "taken advantage of," and so on. Now, years later, we are grown adults. We have families of our own, but all is not well. We are verbally abusive to our family members. Our marriage is not doing so well. We are struggling with many facets of our lives. If we blame our families, then we have lost all ability to make the necessary changes.

But instead of blaming others, what if we acknowledge what happened? We then go to God and say, "Lord, I am making a mess of my life. I have been wrong in how I have treated others and in how I have acted. My thoughts have not been all they should be. Lord, please forgive me. Please help me to change." What do you think God would say?

Do you get the point? When we blame others, we lose our ability to change. By refusing to blame others, we take the first step in growth. God has promised to help us if we will stop blaming.

FINISH

Liz's story is most amazing. Despite the challenges she faced as a child—growing up homeless with drugged-out parents—Liz made something out of her life. Here is the rest of her story, as told by Robert Petterson:

MANUSCRIPT

At age seventeen, this school dropout was hopelessly behind. But she came up with an audacious plan to finish high school in two years, completing a year each semester in an accelerated program. Not only did Liz accomplish that herculean task, she did it with straight A's. When a mentor took her to Harvard, she set her sights on being admitted to America's most prestigious college. Her mother often said, "One day life is going to be better." That day came for Liz when she received a scholarship to pay for Harvard. It wasn't easy for this homeless girl from the streets of New York to fit in to an Ivy League school, but Liz Murray persisted to graduation.

Her story is truly amazing. The once-upon-a-time shoplifter people avoided has gone on to inspire many. She has shared her story on stages with leaders from around the world. She wrote a *New York Times* bestseller, *Breaking Night*, and her life was the inspiration for a movie, *Homeless to Harvard*.

Today Liz is married with two children. She is regularly involved in helping homeless kids at New York's Covenant House. Petterson writes, "She still finds inspiration in a note that her dad gave her just before he died of AIDS: 'Lizzy, I left my dreams behind a long time ago. Now they are safe with you.'"

Do not succumb to the temptation of thinking your family of origin controls your future. God controls your future. Do not blame your family. You can be better than your past.