

Blame shifting, a crippling virus

"Its not my fault!"

"You made me do it."

"She drove me to it."

"I can't help myself."

"It's the government's fault. We are pawns."

From the earliest of times, we are reminded of our tendency to absolve ourselves of responsibility.

Adam blamed Eve. She blamed the serpent.

And the snake, as they say, didn't have a leg to stand on.

We may not be responsible for what happens to us but we are free to choose our responses.

We may not be able to stop the birds flying over our heads but we can choose whether to let them nest in our hair!

It is a fundamental reality that we are free to choose. To do so we need to learn the difference between two four letter words: Can't and Won't.

There is a huge difference between "I can't stop having this affair" and "I won't stop this affair".

In fact, the first step toward freedom is often to simply acknowledge that it is about the will, our choices, not our abilities.

Obviously, the freedom to take responsibility must be cultivated, and the earlier the better.

I realised this very painfully as I reflected on my father's death by suicide nearly 40 years ago. His struggle with reactive depression and residual patterns of coping emotionally need not have resulted in the action he took.

He need not have been a pawn of his history. He did acknowledge in his journal that suicide "would be a denial of all he believed and preached for 36 years".

Unfortunately, it became his reality.

It needn't have been this way.

The Gospel of Jesus leads to healthy church defined by therapeutic connecting.

This is guided by the appropriate application of two truths in Galatians 6.

The first is that we are called to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law, the way, of Christ.

The second is that each one should carry his own load. Compassion and Empowerment!

Meier and Minirth wrote a book some years ago whose title says it all: Happiness is a Choice.

Not to exercise that choice for positive gain is to be trapped by the crippling virus of blame shifting. We so easily blame it on others, on apartheid, on racism, on the Big Six NEC. It is not helping the morale of our nation that blame shifting is so tolerated or encouraged by those in authority.

In the famous parable of the Prodigal Son told by Jesus, the waywardness of the returning prodigal is joyfully forgiven by the father as the son owns his mistakes. He "comes back to his senses" implying that he had taken leave of his senses by his entitlement thinking.

Now as he rejects blame shifting his second chance at a better life opens up.

In contrast, his older brother is still trapped in his entitlement and blame shifting by asserting that his less than satisfying life was due to the father's neglect or indifference.

This hardworking son was missing the point that the father was first and foremost a loving source of connection rather than a hard taskmaster requiring performance-based merits. Religious judgmentalism often makes this mistake.

We see this in the encounter of Jesus with the woman caught in the act of adultery.

She was brought to Him by some religious leaders in order to trap Him into breaking the Law.

Jesus simply scribbled in the dust and said 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her'. He then continued writing in the dust.

Remarkably at this point the accusers began to withdraw, "the older ones first".

What was He writing? Some have speculated that He wrote their names in the dust!

In any case He was correcting their view of blame. And of misogyny! These men blamed her for the adultery! Like the man involved couldn't/wouldn't help himself.

When King David committed adultery with Bathsheba he was confronted by Nathan the prophet who helped him see that he was responsible.

He owned this in Psalm 51 where he says: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so, you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place." (Psalms 51:1-6 NIV).

He does not blame anyone or anything but himself, and acknowledges that he was free to choose – and that he chose wrong. No blame shifting here.

David leaned into God and His Steadfast Love. This is why he was known as a man after God's own Heart.

The same can apply to each one of us, when we acknowledge that we are responsible for our wrongdoings.

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