

# Introduction to Biblical Counseling

## How to Rebuild from Failure

### I. INTRODUCTION

**A. It would be great if after we became Christians we stopped making mistakes, failing, sinning or living in fear of failing. // The sad reality is that we still sin, fail and make mistakes with family, kids, spouse, church, job and friends. We continue to miss the target.**

1. This reality can be disappointing and discouraging for many new and old believers. They may leave the faith and state that it did not work for them. They pray more, read Bibles more, give more, attend church more .... nothing works. They still make mistakes. Fred knows firsthand.

a. Fred's story.

Fred knows the Bible. In fact, there is not a theological issue that he has not studied through thoroughly for himself. His personal library could be the envy of any aspiring pastor. His commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior was firm, and his church involvement as an adult was impressive.

"I know I shouldn't feel this way," Fred began, "but I can't help it. I just don't think God loves me." The look of despair on his face confirmed the desperation in his voice.

"Why do Christians have these feelings? Doesn't becoming a Christian change all that junk? I guess it just doesn't work for dumb, fat, ugly people like me," he concluded, as his eyes dropped to the floor.

After a little prodding, Fred began to share the heart-rending story of an alcoholic father who did not want him, and an angry mother who lashed out in rage and destructive criticism. It became evident that Fred had some unfinished business with both parents, but especially with his father.

Fred's father treated him like a rejected little brother, not like a son. He could never lose a game, especially to Fred. He favored Fred's younger sister and was openly cruel to Fred. He came from a background of alcohol and abuse, and reproduced this "heritage" in his own adulthood.

2. (You're not alone.) The Apostle Paul battled with this sin principle and failure long after he became a believer.

a. Romans 7:15-25, "I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. 16) I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. 17) But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things. 18) I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. 19)

When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. 20) But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am really not the one doing it: the sin within me is doing it. 21) It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22) I love God's law with all my heart. 23) But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. 24) Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? 25) Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: in my mind I really want to obey Gods' law, but because of my sinful nature (core belief system) I am a slave to sin."

- b. In describing his personal battle in Rom. 7:14,15, Paul consistently used present tense verbs whereas he had been using the imperfect (action in the past, from time to time) and the aorist (simple past completed action). It is evident by the use of the present tense verb he was describing his present inner conflict as a Christian with indwelling sin and its continuing effort to control his everyday life (B.K.C., N.T. p. 487).

When you sin or fail as a believer, which consequences do you fear the most, God's or man's? What disappointments did you see in yourself after you became a believer? What changes in your life did you think would automatically take place after you became a believer?

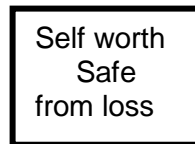
- B. One of the most controlling fears a person can have is the fear of failure and the feelings of shame that follow. // But the deeper fear behind failure is rejection and loss of respect felt especially by men. The logic is, "If I fail, I will be rejected. No one likes a failure." Men carry their pride, worth and value in a small, fragile case; not in a steel brief case. It is said of men that their ego is the most fragile thing on planet earth.**

What influence has the fear of failure and possible rejection played out in your life? How do you think your life would be different if that fear was greatly reduced? What experiences have you had with failure itself and subsequent rejection?

1. (Even) Significant education (position, wealth) does not remove this fear of failure and rejection.
  - a. Dr. Paul Meier states, "Physicians and dentists have the highest suicide rates in our current American culture. They are overwhelmed with pressure and have an enormous fear of failure" (which includes rejection.) What does it feel like?
  - b. Skit. While teaching on rejection, bring someone up to the front of the class. Have him write on an 8 1/2" by 11" paper, "God loves me." Then as he shows the class what he has written, snatch the paper out of his hands, wad it up and throw it out to the class. Pause, then, ask the student how he felt. Most all the time they feel angry. The word rejection means "to throw behind" in disgust.

2. One of the results of this fear of failure and loss of respect is that you create a safe environment zone for your emotional safety. We play self protection games. // These are called comfort zones. These zones are defined by fear; not faith. Some are defined by guilt and shame.

a. Drawing:



Faith:  
 Great risk of loss, only in time, not in eternity. Heb. 11:6

- b. But God has made it clear that without faith (trust in Him), it is impossible to please Him and to grow spiritually.
- 1) Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith (trust) it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
  - 2) All Old Testament men and women of faith had to step out of their comfort zones and risk loss by doing so.
    - a) Joshua 3:13, "And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, *that* the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap."
- c. Yes, there is the possibility you will experience pain and loss outside your comfort zone in the sphere of faith. It is a myth that the safest place in the world is in the center of God's will. The Apostle Paul experienced much loss and pain while serving God.
- 1) II Corinthians 11:22-28, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. 23) Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool - I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24) From the Jews, five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25) Three times I was beaten with rods: once I was stoned: three times I was shipwrecked: a night and a day I have been in the deep. 26) In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. 27) In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - 28) besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."
  - 2) Was Paul in the center of God's will? Did he experience both physical and emotional pain (Phil. 4:12)? His pain in the faith zone was laying up for him many rewards (II Timothy 4:7-8).

- d. (The good news is) “When we follow Jesus and take the risk, God takes responsibility for the outcome. When we fail to follow Jesus and take the risk, we take responsibility for the outcome.”

What are your comfort zones? What fear do you think defines the comfort zones in your life? How do you think they were developed? How have they managed your life? What have you done to attempt to break out of them?

**C. Fears of failure, rejection and loss of respect lie at the root of several suicides recorded in Scripture which are all men (7, all men).**

1. Abimelech
  - a. He feared for the loss of his honor after being mortally struck by a mill stone a woman had thrown down from a high tower. He asked his armor bearer to kill him (Judges 9:54).
2. Samson
  - a. He sought revenge for the loss of his two eyes after he made the mistake of giving up the secret to his strength (Judges 16:30).
3. Saul
  - a. After he was mortally wounded in battle, he feared that the uncircumcised Philistines would find him and torture him (shame, and pain) (I Sam. 31: 4).
4. Saul’s armor bearer
  - a. He may have feared what would happen to him if he was captured so he killed himself (I Sam. 31:5).
5. Ahithophel (King David’s former counselor)
  - a. He realized that both he and his counsel were rejected by Absalom so he hung himself (2 Sam. 17:23). He could not live with the shame and loss.
6. Zimri
  - a. He saw Israel reject him as king and when they came to kill him he burned his house down while he remained inside (I Kings 16:18).
7. Judas
  - a. His guilt over betraying Christ and his inability to undo it drove him to kill himself (Matt. 27:5).

How has someone else’s fear of failure affected you growing up or now as an adult?

**D. (Big Surprise) Most of the great men in Scripture made mistakes (failed) sometime in their life and needed to be forgiven. // Scripture records both the greatness of their faith and the greatness of their failures. Scripture is intellectually honest.**

1. Adam ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6).
2. Noah got drunk and exposed himself to his sons (Gen. 9:21).
3. Abraham folded under pressure from his wife and fathered Ishmael by Hagar (Gen. 16:15).
4. Isaac gave his wife to King Abimelech to save his own life (Gen. 26:7).
5. Jacob was a masterful deceiver and played favorites with his two wives and his children (Gen. 47:9).
6. Moses lost control of his temper and struck a rock to get water for the children of Israel instead of obeying God and speaking to the rock (Num. 20:11-12). // Results?
  - a. He was not allowed to go into the Promised Land.
  - b. Moses blamed the people but God blamed Moses (Deut. 3:25, 26).
7. Joshua failed to ask God's counsel regarding the Gibeonites and was deceived by them (Josh. 9:14).
8. David abused his power and position, morally violated Bathsheba and killed her husband to cover up the affair for almost a year (2 Sam. 11).
9. Solomon had many wives and ultimately went into idolatry (I Kings 11).
  - a. He developed a sex addiction: 700 wives; 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3).
  - b. His immorality ultimately turned his heart away from the Lord and he legitimized idolatry in Israel (I Kings 11:4-8).
10. Peter
  - a. Denied the Lord out of fear of rejection (Luke 22:31-32).
  - b. Later, Peter abandoned his Gentile friends out of fear of rejection by prominent Jews and was confronted by Paul for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14).
11. James and John fought for position in our Lord's kingdom (Mark 10:35).
  - a. Men place high value on positions because of their need for respect.

- b. They believed their personal value would increase if they had a high position. So did their mother.
12. Yet, many of these people are in God's hall of fame of faith in Hebrews 11 even though they failed greatly in life. They are winners though they experienced failure from time to time.

Of all the men in Scripture who have failed, which one impresses you the most and why?

13. But why do you think God recorded both their failures and their successes? // For your benefit!
- a. I Corinthians 10:6,11, "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.....<sup>11</sup> Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

**E. (Little problem) But on one hand God says that His ideal man (servant) must be "above reproach" or "blameless." // Yet on the other hand there are no perfect people who have not made a mistake. How do you balance these two realities?**

How have you pictured a "blameless man" in the past?  
What do you think a blameless man should look like now?  
How do you think that picture was formed?  
What personalities played a part in forming that picture?

1. Timothy was left by Paul at Ephesus to appoint elders. In I Timothy 3:2, Paul explained to Timothy that elders, the leaders in his church, must be blameless. Timothy was asked to identify and to appoint men who were blameless.
  - a. I Tim. 3:2, "A bishop then must be blameless. // the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach."
2. Timothy had a practical (cultural) problem. Ephesus was a leading city in the Roman Empire. It was the home of the great Ephesian goddess, Diana (Acts 19:23-41). Most of the believers were converts from paganism. There were no perfect people who had not sinned or made mistakes. How then could Timothy find a blameless man to be an elder in that culture?
3. (Yet even) The scripture makes it clear that all of us have missed the target (goal; standard) of God's holiness (Rom. 3:23). The word sin means "to miss the mark" (target)

whether by a foot or a yard. Paul shared his personal, private struggle with the Romans while ministering publicly (Rom. 7:15-25).

a. Rom. 3:23 states “For all have sinned (arosit tense, simple past tense) and falls short (present tense, i.e., “keeps falling short”) of the glory of God (or God’s standard for holiness).

1) You have failed in the past and you’ll fail again in the present.

4. Therefore, if all have sinned, and keeps falling short of God’s holy standard, where would one find a blameless man?

How would you counsel a man who has sinned to become a blameless man? What would he have to do?

#### **F. Key questions to be addressed:**

1. How can I become a blameless man (winner) after I have made some big mistakes (loser)?
2. How can I end the control of guilt and shame for past sins (mistakes and failures) committed before and after I became a believer? And, avoid the fear of discovery?
3. How can I rebuild trust and my personal testimony after I have failed? Can a failure ever become a winner? Does my past have to be my future? Does my past have to define my future?

#### **G. The first step is to understand what the Apostle Paul meant by the word “blameless.”**

### **DEFINE BLAMELESS**

**II. Understand what a blameless believer is. // Or, what does God mean by the word “blameless?” Remember, freedom and winning begins with truth. That truth may need to start by a change of perspective.**

**A. This particular word for “blameless” (Greek - *anepileptos*) only appears three times in the New Testament; all of them in I Timothy.**

1. Of elders in I Tim. 3:2. “A bishop (overseer) then must be blameless...”
2. Of widows in I Tim. 5:7. “These things command, that they (widows) may be blameless.
3. Of Timothy in I Tim. 6:14. “Keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus’ appearing.”

**B. How the Greek word “blameless” is constructed gives us a clue as to its meaning. // It has three parts.**

1. Parts: “No” (a Greek “*a*” means “no”) + “upon” (preposition for stress, *epi*) + “to take hold of” (the verb *lambano*).

### C. What is the meaning of the word “blameless”?

1. The literal translation of blameless is, “not able to take hold of,” with a special purpose or reason. Not open to censure, irreproachable, or give ground for accusation.
  - a. Key thought: “No one is trying to get their hands on you because you have done something wrong and made no effort to correct it.”
  - b. No one is saying, “I’d ring his neck if I could find him and get my hands on him.”
    - 1) Project: Act out this concept in a skit. Have one person grab a ten dollar bill out of the hand of another and take off running around the room with it. The other fellow pursues the “thief” but does not catch up with the “thief.” But when the “thief” returns the \$10 willingly and asks forgiveness, the other brother is not looking for him to get his \$10 back with a full apology. The thief is now blameless.
  - c. These people would include at least your wife, husband, son, daughter, brother, sister, boss, employee, teacher, student, pastor, elder.

Who in your past has offended or hurt you and has made little or no effort to make it right? How has that experience affected you? What would they need to do for it to be all right with you?

2. To be blameless means there is no ground (or basis, reason) for an accusation because you have made every effort to correct or to reconcile in truth. // In this sense he is “irreproachable.”
  - a. Because of a fear of failure, rejection and loss of respect, most men tend to only confess that which they are confronted with and are forced to acknowledge to protect their pride. Initiative is rarely taken to confess or acknowledge a wrong they know they have done because of this fear.

Why do men tend to not take initiative to acknowledge a wrong? What fear is behind that reluctance? How would a secure relationship with Jesus Christ potentially reduce that fear?

- b. In contrast, the blameless man takes the initiative to be transparent with everyone. He can be held up to the light of truth and be found to be completely clear because he has confessed it all.
3. Summary: Blameless does not mean he has never made a mistake, but as far as he is able, physically, materially and spiritually, he has done everything within his power to



acknowledge where he was wrong and to correct it where possible and to make any restitution where appropriate and restore fellowship.

- a. It means no one (wife, son, daughter, friend) is waiting for you to come to them to correct an offense. He has gone to everyone he knows he has offended and made every effort humanly possible to make it right.
  - 1) Is someone waiting for you to make something right?
- b. Reconciliation and restitution are so important that God would prefer you suspend your religious service if necessary to go and attempt to get reconciled.
  - 1) Jesus stressed the importance of taking the initiative to go to the offended one.
  - 2) Matt. 5:23, 24 “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”
  - 3) Reconciliation was more important than acts of service or ritual acts of worship. Notice he leaves his offering at the altar where it belongs, reconciles, then returns to offer it. Gifts to God are not a substitute for obedience to Jesus’ command to be reconciled. (1 Samuel 15:22) Jesus does not describe how the reconciliation process is to take place.

What personal experience have you had in going to one you had offended? How did you do it? What was the response? What were the benefits from doing this? Who have you gone to in order to make something right and it did not result in reconciliation? What do you think went wrong? What would you do differently? Why do you feel they did not respond to you favorably?

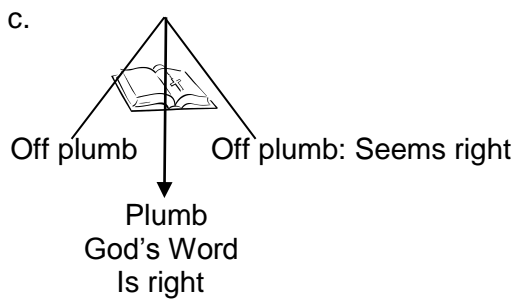
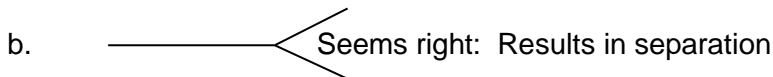
**III. What does a blameless believer look like? // What would a portrait of a blameless believer look like?**

## **SEARCH HIS HEART**

- A. **(Search his heart) A blameless believer will honestly ask God to search his own heart (past and present) and reveal any sin (offense) in any part of his life. // This sounds scary. But it is like performing a virus scan on the computer in order to eliminate it, so the computer can function properly.**
  1. He will pray a similar prayer like King David prayed.

- a. Ps. 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24) And see if there be any hurtful (wicked) way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."
  - b. "Wicked way" (literally, "way of pain") pains caused by being afflicted for wrong doing.
2. He will re-evaluate patterns of behavior, attitudes or ways of communication that he believes are right but he is coming to realize that some are wrong.

- a. Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way *that seems* right to a man, But its end *is* the way of death."



- d. When in doubt, check it out with God and those around you.

## ASSUMES RESPONSIBILITY

**B. (Assume responsibility) A blameless believer will assume full responsibility for his own behavior in life and in relationships. // What does that look like in real life?**

- 1. He does not shift any blame for his behavior onto someone else.
  - a. Blame shifting is a tactic to hide (avoid) personal failure.
  - b. Blame shifting is like looking at your dirty face in a mirror and washing the mirror.



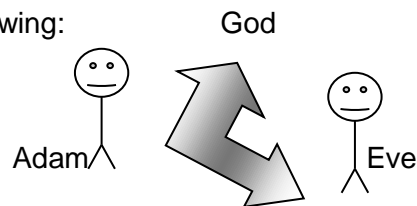
- d. Sample of blame shifting statements:
  - 1) "Yes, I did it, but..."
  - 2) "If it were not for you..."
  - 3) "Look who's talking."

- 4) "If you hadn't ... I wouldn't have ...."
  - 5) "I couldn't help it."
  - 6) "You made me do it."
- e. Blame shifting is the second phase of an argument that usually ends up destroying a relationship. The first phase is that you start with an issue.
- 1) Start with an issue (but to avoid dealing with the issue we start....)
  - 2) (Second phase) Blame shifting, issue hopping, name calling, history channel, (then we....)
  - 3) (Third phase) Start questioning keeping the relationship (i.e., divorce).

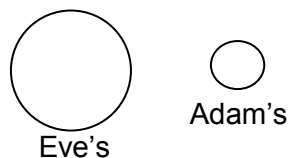
What was the hardest responsibility you have had to assume in order to restore a relationship? What motivated you to do that? Where did you learn to do that?

- f. The blame shifting pattern started immediately after the first sin committed by Adam and Eve and they were confronted by God. The basis of blame shifting is sin.
- 1) Gen. 3:12, "Then the man (Adam) said to God, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'"
- a) He blamed his wife ("the woman").
  - b) Then he blamed God ("Whom YOU gave to be with me").

c) Drawing:



- 2) It was Adam's strategy to shrink his circle of responsibility for his part of their sin and expand Eve's and God's.



- 3) Eve was deceived into eating the fruit (I Tim. 2:14) but Adam willfully sinned and the Apostle Paul put the primary responsibility equally on Adam's shoulders (CF.

Rom. 5:12-21). Sin nature is passed down from Adam; not Eve. That's why Jesus could be born through Mary without a sin nature.

- a) They both lost three things; 1) A sense of value and worth, 2) A purpose in life, 3) A sense of their real identity.
- g. Again, (review) Blame shifting is a self-protective strategy to take attention off your own responsibility for a wrong and shift it on to someone else who may be innocent or is guilty of something unrelated. Shifting blame is a deliberate failure to assume full responsibility for one's own behavior.
- h. The forgiven believer will totally focus on his own responsibilities and at least temporarily ignore other's responsibilities for the conflict while he works on his own responsibilities. Jesus emphasizes this step first.
  - 1) Matt. 7:4-5, "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck (of sawdust) out of your eye,' and behold, the log (plank) is in your own eye? 5) You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."
  - a) People with planks in their eyes think they see clearly.

What fears are behind the pattern of blame shifting? How do you think those patterns were developed? What does one stand to gain or lose by blame shifting?

- 2. He does not defend (protect) himself for his wrong words, behaviors or attitudes. // (Why?)
  - a. In sports, defenders rarely score points. If one resorts to being defensive he will ultimately lose. "Defenders are losers."
    - 1) Defenders may attempt to preserve their pride (value) but in doing so they may lose a relationship. They would rather be right than have a relationship.
    - 2) No one wants to warm up relationally to a person after they have just defended their wrong behavior. But they will warm up to a humble person who acknowledges a wrong (I Peter 5:5; James 4:10).

Why do people tend to withdraw from one who habitually defends himself?  
How does a defender plan on winning?  
How should he change his strategy in order to win?

- b. Instead of defending himself, the blameless believer honestly listens to the accusation and agrees with his accusers where appropriate. He is willing to admit his mistake without adding a "but."

- 1) Matt. 5:25 “Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.”
  - 2) Romans 12:18, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”
- c. He listens with a constructive rather than a destructive attitude.
- d. He makes an honest attempt to see the accuser’s side or perspective.
3. He can humbly admit his wrong by saying, “I was wrong” without adding any “buts.” “But” is an eraser word. // Why is saying “I was wrong” so important?
- a. The word “confession” means “agree with God.” It does not mean to inform God. (Confess - Greek. *homo*, “same,” *lego*, “to speak”).
    - 1) Confess - “to say the same thing as another,” to admit that you are guilty of what you are accused of, the result of inward conviction.” (Vine p. 120)
    - 2) I John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
  - b. When we confess our sins to God, we say the same thing about that sin as what God would say.
    - 1) “Sins” is in the plural which means the confession must be specific as well as general.
  - c. Do not say, “I am sorry” until after you say, “I was wrong.”
    - 1) Saying “I was wrong” is guaranteed to reduce your fights at least 75%. What can you reply to someone who says they are wrong?
    - 2) If you say, “I’m sorry” but do not have the repentant emotions behind that statement, then the other person will shoot back to you and state, “No, you’re not!” But if you state you are wrong, it is very hard to argue with that statement.
  - d. You can offer to explain your actions now or at a later time and allow them to choose when.
    - 1) Usually curiosity prompts them to ask for it now. Allowing them to ask for the explanation opens the door of their mind. Failing to ask permission to share or to allow them to choose the time for the explanation usually shuts the door of the mind.
4. He will confess his sin once to God and once to those he offended.

- a. Re-confession to God or man only reinforces the lie that the sin was not forgiven. Memories of our sin are not to motivate us to re-confess. If we confess the same past sin a thousand times, that is 999 times too many and will lead to potential depression and false guilt. 1 John 1:9 does not say “If we re-confess our sin ...” Later we will explain the value of memories.
  - b. But sadness for past actions is appropriate and often appreciated (CF I Cor 15:9; I Tim. 1:12-16).
5. He will humbly ask for forgiveness after stating, “I was wrong.”
6. Repent in heart first and then, in actions.
- a. Change of heart means for you to actually believe in your heart your action was wrong. Failure to do this is almost a guarantee you will repeat the action because you really did not believe it was wrong in the first place.
  - b. Confess, repent (change thinking and actions), rebuild, reconcile.
7. He will humbly pray for those who have been critical (Matt. 5:44).

What experience have you had in saying “I was wrong” and what was the response? What reaction have you experienced by just saying “sorry” or “I’m sorry?” If you just said “I am sorry” what do you guess the response would be if you stated “I was wrong”? Why do you think it may be easier to say “I’m sorry” than “I was wrong”? What would your family prefer to hear you say and why?

## REBUILD TRUST

### **C. (Rebuild trust) A blameless believer is willing to make every effort to rebuild the trust he has violated. // (one building block at a time. People tend to reject you efforts at first).**

- 1. (Yet) He knows there is a difference between forgiveness and trust.
  - a. Forgiveness is what others grant because of what Christ has done (i.e., forgave us).
    - 1) Ephesians 4:32, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”
    - 2) Forgiveness does mean you grant permission to the offender to take at least baby steps in rebuilding the trust.
    - 3) Forgiveness handles the legal part of forgiveness. There has been an offense but it is now forgiven.
  - b. Trust is what we earn because of what we have done.

- 1) The offended one, not the offender, determines what it will take to rebuild the trust.
    - a) ill: A wife may want to see her husband's cell phone bill since he used his cell phone to call a woman he was having an affair with.
  - 2) Rebuilding trust handles the relational rebuilding part of forgiveness.
  - 3) Forgiveness does not mean the automatic restoration of relationships. It is only the first step.
  - 4) Trust builders do not demand trust. Often those who demand trust want to escape the consequences of their failure or want to take a short cut to healing.
2. He knows that the only thing worse than a mistake is an uncorrected mistake. // He knows the difference between failing (action) and being a failure (identity).
- a. We did not say just acknowledge a mistake. Acknowledgment is not correction. Diagnosing a disease is not the same thing as taking the cure for the disease. It is only the "doers" who are winners.
    - 1) James 1:25, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does."
    - 2) God does not bless those who only identify events or those who have had their guilty past assigned to them, or those who assume responsibility for their part, He only blesses those who **do** what's in their circle of responsibility.
  - b. He knows what he has done wrong and has corrected it and returned to doing the next right thing. He is more than willing to make appropriate adjustments.
    - 1) Revelation 2:5, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen: repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent."
3. He is willing to take all the necessary steps to rebuild the trust because trust is the first thing lost in an offense. // He will take the initiative to ask what it will take to rebuild the trust while realizing that a changed heart must precede changed actions if the change is going to stick (Psalm 51:16-17).
- a. John Mark had to rebuild trust in the eyes of the Apostle Paul after he abandoned Paul in Pamphylia and failed to continue with the ministry he had committed himself to.
    - 1) Acts 15:37-39, "Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. 38) But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39) And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus."

- b. Later Paul asked Timothy to come to Rome where he was in prison and bring Mark with him.
  - 1) II Timothy 4:11, "(Timothy)...Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry."
  - 2) Barnabus' desire to salvage Mark was now paying dividends to Paul personally (CF. Col. 4:10).
- c. Onesimus was a slave who had run away from Philemon, his owner. He later became a believer under the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul sent Onesimus back to his master a new man and now a brother in Christ who could be trusted. But he was not blameless because Philemon was still looking for him.
  - 1) Philemon 10-13, "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11) who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12) I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13) whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel."

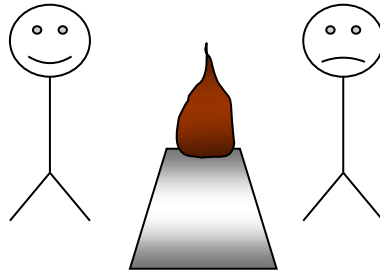
What experience have you had in rebuilding trust? How did you do it?  
 What did you learn from that experience and what suggestions would you offer others who are rebuilding trust?

- 4. He knows rebuilding trust will take time and effort (energy). // Therefore, he is patient and does not make demands that the offended one forget the offense and move on. He is aware that:
  - a. Prov. 18:19, "A brother (wife, husband or children) offended is harder to win back than a strong city, //and contentions are like the bars of a castle.
    - 1) ill.: Middle East crusader castles were strong but all were ultimately conquered in time. Every wall erected around a wounded heart potentially can be scaled.
    - 2) Women tend to stay emotionally stuck at the point of emotional impact of the hurt. I believe God uses this so that the offender will return to the sin and use scriptural tools to heal the hurt he caused.
    - 3) Men do not like to be reminded of their failure.
  - b. He knows it could take months or years of rebuilding before the wounded person will heal.
  - c. A repentant offender will not tell the offended one how much he has changed. If the offended one can't see it, it probably didn't happen.



- d. The reverse is true also. The offended one refuses to acknowledge the change in order to control or punish the offender.
5. He also knows it is not his responsibility to remind or to inform others of their responsibility to forgive him. // Why? That's God's job. His total focus is to be on his responsibility to take the necessary steps to change his heart and to rebuild the trust.
- Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."
  - 1 John 3:18, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."
6. He also understands that his best efforts may not result in reconciliation. He can do everything right and it will blow up in his face. // One of the characteristics of the end times is that people will not be reconcilable.
- II Tim. 3:3, "unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good."
    - "irreconcilable" used only here in New Testament, lit., "without libation" or "drink offering".
    - Two warring generals are pictured here meeting to seal a treaty. One general pours a wine offering on an altar signifying he agrees to the terms of the treaty. The other general refuses to pour out a drink offering on the same altar because he does not agree to the terms of the treaty and then resumes the hostilities. He is irreconcilable as indicated by his failure to offer a libation offering.

3) Drawing:



7. He fully understands there must be a change of heart (core beliefs, entitlements) behind the changed actions. // Failure to change the heart will result in the person ultimately returning to their old ways. Families do not want offenders to jump through hoops (i.e. "just tell me what you want me to do!"), they want to see a changed heart.
- Psalm 51:16-17, "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it. 17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart. These, O God, You will not despise."
  - King David was willing to jump through hoops (i.e. make any sacrifice) but God had made it clear to David He wanted his heart changed, not just jumping through hoops by changing his behavior. David had an entitlement in his heart that since he was the king, he could do anything he wanted, even if it was wrong. He felt lust for Bathsheba

and he believed he was entitled to act on it. He laid aside all he knew about God and His Word. It is the entitlements (or rights) of the heart that justify our sin and rebellion against God's laws, i.e. adultery.

- c. David did not morally violate Bathsheba out of love. Adultery is never an act of love because God clearly explains that love "does not seek its own" interests. (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Describe an event when you offended someone and they specified what you had to do to rebuild trust or confidence. How did you feel about what you had to do? How did you feel during that time? What was the outcome of your efforts?

## WELCOME PERSONAL EXAMINATION

- D. A blameless believer can now withstand impartial examination where ever he goes. // (by God, family, friends, neighbor, boss and the church because he has gone back and declared he was wrong and asked for forgiveness and made restitution where needed or possible.)**
1. He can welcome personal scrutiny by anyone because he has a clear conscience before God and man. // This was the goal of the Apostle Paul.
    - a. Acts 24:16, (Paul) ". . . I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men."
    - b. Ill.: Author John Eldridge was afraid for people to find out he talked his girlfriend into having an abortion, so he became a perfectionist to hide his shame. Later he acknowledged it publicly.
  2. He welcomes others' observations about his mistakes (i.e. feedback) so he can improve his character. He may have blind spots in his character or behavior he does not see. // He does not regard himself to be without mistakes. "I do not see anything wrong with that."
    - a. The believer's conscience is not impartial because he has "blind spots" in his behavior from a built-in deceptive heart.
      - 1) Jer. 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick."
        - a) ill. My wife, Linda, once pointed out to me that I had been harsh to our daughter which had caused her to run up to her room in tears. I then went to her room to acknowledge I was wrong and ask for forgiveness.
        - b) He may reason to himself or others. "I don't see anything wrong with that." God and His Word is the standard, not our deceived hearts.
    - b. He has honest friends that, in love, will point out those blind spots for accountability. This is the value of participating in small accountability groups.

- 1) Prov. 27:6a “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”
  - 2) Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.
  - 3) James 5:19-20, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, 20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”
- c. Unfortunately, those who see our blind spots the clearest are often the last ones we want to hear from about our blind spots. (i.e. wife, because of loss of respect).
- d. He is balanced in his introspection and is not neurotic or perfectionistic about it.
- 1) I John 3:20-21, “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 21) Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.”

What is our normal response when someone points out a character flaw, mistake, or bad habit we are doing? Why do we respond that way?  
 What prevents us from receiving that correction and growing through it?  
 What would be a healthy way to accept that correction that wouldn't sound fake?

## LIVE GUILT FREE

### **E. (Guilt free) A blameless believer is no longer controlled by guilt. // Why?**

1. He can distinguish between true guilt and false guilt even though they feel the same.
  - a. True guilt means we are worthy of blame which results in valid conviction.
    - 1) Conviction (blame) is the function of the Holy Spirit.
      - a) John 16:8, “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”
      - b) Genesis 42:21 “Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’”
  - 2) God can use others to help to bring about this conviction.

- a) Gal. 6:1, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”
- b) II Tim. 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”
- b. False guilt means in reality we are not worthy of blame (liable) but we still feel we are.  
// Our feelings are not rightly responding to truth, indeed they are responding to a lie.
- c. The blameless believer makes a habit of testing his emotions with truth just like we are to test all teachers with truth because of the prevalence of false teachers and their false doctrine.
  - 1) I John 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

2) Drawing:

<u>List Feelings</u>	<u>List Truth / Fact</u>
1.	1.
2.	2.

- d. But he still has the responsibility to earn trust, although he is forgiven.
  - 1) Proverbs 18:19, “A brother offended is harder to be won (restored) than (to conquer) a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a citadel.”
- e. You are still responsible to confess your offense and ask forgiveness from the offended one once. But if the offended one does not forgive you, you are still blameless before God. It just means the fellowship between you and the offender is broken. (CF I Jn. 1:5-10). God wants you to be led by His Spirit, not by guilt (CF Rom. 8:14).
- 2. He does not waste his time in attempting to do the dysfunctional action of “forgiving himself.”
  - a. There is not one verse in the entire Bible that suggests, encourages or commands the act of self forgiveness. “Self forgiveness” is a dysfunctional substitute for fully accepting God’s forgiveness. The issue is acceptance, not forgiveness. Imagine the prayer you would have to pray to forgive yourself. You would have to be schizophrenic- (two personalities).
  - b.
    - 1) Self forgiver’s version of I Jn 1:9: “If I confess my sin to myself, I am faithful and I am just to forgive me of my sin and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness.” (SIC)
  - c. Instead, your real task is to identify the lie in your core belief system that you are not “cleansed from all unrighteousness,” replace it with truth; then, praise God for it.

- d. It is very appropriate to feel a sense of sadness for past actions. Sadness is a normal emotion. But do not confuse sadness (sorrow) with guilt.
- 1) The Apostle Paul felt a sense of sadness, regret the years following his conversion.
    - a) I Tim. 1:12-16
    - b) I Cor. 15: 9,10
  - (1) Acts 8:3
3. He is now able to circulate anywhere safely without feeling guilty or fearful that someone will pop-up out of the past and attack or condemn him.
- a. Jerry, the barber was afraid someone would ask him about the fight he had and the fact he had to go to jail on the weekends for six weeks. When he learned to weave his past sin into a testimony of what Christ did in his life, he then welcomed inquiries from anyone.

How would your life be different if you were able to consistently distinguish between true guilt and false guilt?

## ACCEPT CONSEQUENCES

- F. (Accepts consequences) A blameless believer has accepted upon himself all the consequences of his sin. // They are not to be a source of bitterness but a source to build godly character and allow for godly sorrow over the past actions. He now views them as stepping stones to deeper character development instead of stumbling blocks of guilt and shame.**
1. He knows consequences are not punishment. // Why? Because Jesus bore all the punishment for our sin on the cross.
    - a. Rom. 8:1, "There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit."
  2. He also realizes God does not exempt believers from consequences or the cause and effects of their sin.
    - a. Gal. 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."
      - 1) There are natural consequences for the forgiven sin here on earth.
        - a) Grown kids may be away from God today because of past wrong parental and relational patterns.

- 2) There will be eternal loss of some rewards because of past sinful patterns.
  - a) II Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."
  - b) In the "sow - reap" principle (Gal. 6:7), the farmer is the one who determined the crop.
  
3. He not only accepts the consequences but chooses to use them to grow in character and to learn from them. You are going to live with them either way.
  - a. Luke 22:31, 32, "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.'"
    - 1) The word "sift" is a word picture describing Satan's goal to separate Peter from his faith in Jesus because of his failure.
      - a) Satan wanted to get Peter to fail so badly that Peter would feel God would not take him back.
    - 2) "Strengthen your brothers" - Peter was to use what he learned through his personal failure to strengthen his fellow believers.
      - a) ill. Mike B. restored his relationship with his wife after his affair and is a trophy of God's grace and forgiveness and joins her in teaching couples communication classes.
  - b. David, after his repentance from adultery and murder, visualized himself returning to his role as a teacher.
    - 1) Ps. 51:13, "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You."
      - a) "Converted" This O.T. word means change in direction and in life. It does not refer to a salvation experience.
  
4. But he knows God is rich in mercy. // God may choose to withhold the punishment or the consequence that we do deserve.
  - a. Eph. 2:4, "God, who is rich in mercy..."
    - 1) Grace is favor that is not deserved. Mercy is withholding punishment we do deserve.
  - b. II Samuel 12:13, "So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

How have you been able to learn from a mistake and actually experience positive benefits from the consequences?

## BE A TROPHY OF GRACE

### G. As a forgiven believer, he views himself now as a trophy of God's grace.

1. The Apostle Paul had a high appreciation for God's grace because he remembered what he had been forgiven.
  - a. I Corinthians 15:9-10, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain: but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."
2. Paul distinguished between a glance (into the past) and a glare (into the past). // He rarely mentions his past sins unless he can use them to illustrate a point. But he did not mention his past sins in every book God used him to write.
  - a. Focusing on a rear view mirror of the past can set you up for a crash in the present. Choose to glance at the rearview mirror of the past but also choose to primarily focus, looking out the windshield of the present and future.

We have all failed or sinned in life. Describe the struggle you went through before you were able to use your failure (sin) as a means of personal growth. How have you been able to use a past sin or failure to grow in character and maturity?

## BE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD

### H. A blameless believer knows he will ultimately only be held accountable before God for what is in his own circle of responsibility. // But he also makes himself accountable to fellow believers now.

1. All believers will be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ.
  - a. II Cor. 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."
    - 1) This is to take place following the rapture of the church.

- 2) Salvation is not the issue here. Your eternal destiny in heaven was settled at the point of personal salvation by faith (Eph. 2:8-9). But the deeds issuing from that faith will be evaluated and rewarded (II Cor 5:10).
  - 3) I Cor. 3:12-15, gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, stubble.
2. All believers need to be subject to one another.
    - a. Eph. 5:21, "Submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord."

How have you viewed the judgment seat of Christ? What would you do differently now if you focused on that future event? How do you think we would do church differently if we focused on this ultimate accountability?

## MINISTER FREELY

- I. **A blameless believer is now in a position of freedom to minister and to serve others out of a deep sense of love for the Lord.**
  1. King David illustrated this freedom to minister after his adultery.
    - a. Psalm 51:13, "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted (restored) to You."
  2. The blameless believer is now free to be led by the Holy Spirit and not guilt, shame or fear of discovery.
    - a. Rom. 8:14, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."
  3. He has renewed energy because it is not being drained off by guilt which often results in depression.
    - a. Ill: A battery in a car can have a short in the wiring so that all the power does not go to the starter. The battery works but it has less cranking power to turn the motor over to get it started. With guilt removed, the emotional battery stays fully charged.
  4. He has ended any accusation of hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another.
    - a. Others will justify their own personal sin if they can blame another Christian for being a hypocrite. Believers who fail and correct it are not hypocrites. They are living out what God has told them to do. They are obedient.
      - 1) Rom. 14:13, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle of a stumbling block in a brother's way."



5. He has used his past memories of his sin to walk humbly in the present.
  - a. Ephesians 3:8, "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."
6. He uses his past memories of forgiven sin as a motivation to love the Lord.
  - a. (Forgiven prostitute) Luke 7:47, "Therefore I (Jesus) say to you, her sins which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."
  - b. II Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;"

Why would you say it is important to keep a clear conscience before other believers, non-believers and family members? If children have to choose between what they are told to do or what was role modeled before them, which do you think they will choose? Why? How have you seen this played out in any of your relationships?

## LIVE HUMBLY

- J. A blameless man knows he will make other mistakes because he is human but he is not paralyzed by the fear of making them.**
1. A blameless believer will fall (fail) again.
    - a. Prov. 24:16, "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, // but the wicked stumble in time of calamity."
    - b. James 3:2, "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well."
  2. But he will recover because he will use his biblical tools to correct the mistake.
    - a. I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
    - b. James 5:16, "Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

## **BUILD ON MISTAKES**

### **K. A blameless believer will use past and present mistakes as building blocks, not stumbling blocks, for the present and future.**

1. The Apostle Paul did this.
  - a. I Timothy 1:12-16, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry. 13) although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14) And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15) This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16) However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."
2. Prominent men and women today have built major ministries from past failures.
  - a. Chuck Colson, Prison Fellowship, spent time in prison for his Watergate involvement.
  - b. Max Lucado, pastor and author, is a former alcoholic.
  - c. Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham organization, was a former alcoholic and all that lifestyle entailed.
3. Unfortunately, most men do all in their power to hide a past failure and hope and pray no one ever finds out about it because of their fear of loss and respect. They will become over achievers, workaholics and perfectionists, performers and hidiers.

In what ways have you been able to use a past failure to prepare you to be effective in your life or ministry today?

## **STAND TALL**

### **L. A blameless believer can stand tall because he has done everything possible to restore relationships.**

1. After you have done all you can do in your circle of responsibility, the only thing left is to stand still and leave the results of your efforts with God.
  - a. Eph. 6:13b, "and having done all, to stand"
2. Standing tall means you have done everything that depends on you in your circle of responsibility.

- a. Rom. 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."
3. Standing tall means you keep following Jesus' pattern and keep recommitting yourself before the Lord Jesus, the righteous Judge. He knows the truth and totally understands because of all He went through.
- a. I Peter 2:23, "And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."
    - 1) The verb "entrusting" is an imperfect verb which means the action happened from time-to-time in the past. It was not a one-time act. Since Peter is describing an action Jesus did in the past, he is explaining to his readers, when Jesus was on earth He had to repeatedly entrust Himself to His Father who understood completely what Jesus was going through. Jesus knew His Father knew the truth and would deal with it rightly.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

#### **V. Keys for Success**

- A. Realize mistakes will be made.**
- B. Understand what a blameless believer is.**
- C. Ask God to search your heart.**
- D. Assume responsibility for all your actions.**
- E. Rebuild trust.**
- F. Welcome impartial examination.**
- G. End the control of guilt.**
- H. Accept all consequences for behavior.**
- I. Stay accountable to God first.**
- J. Minister to others freely.**
- K. Build on the mistakes.**
- L. Stand tall when all that can be done is done.**

# How to Rebuild from Failure

## Small Group Questions

1. In the past how did you understand what it meant to be blameless? What is your perspective on it now?
2. What would it cost you personally to be a totally blameless believer?
3. What would it take for you to be willing to pay that cost?
4. What do you think you would gain if you followed the steps to becoming blameless or what would you lose if you didn't?
5. What attempts have you made to become blameless toward another person who refused your overtures?
6. What are the hardest responsibilities you have had to assume in order to be a blameless believer?
7. In what areas have you been forgiven and what steps did you take to rebuild trust?
8. What is your experience in distinguishing between true and false guilt?
9. Now, what baby steps are you going to take to be a blameless believer?