Blame Game

Darren Wright

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for August 8–14, 2016.

MAKING THE CONNECTION
“As I write this session, I’m aware of a number of things going on around the world.

“In Australia, we’ve participated in a federal/national election. During the campaign, blame was thrown about like an old rag. After the election, more blame was shuffled around by the media, politicians, and people with opinions everywhere. We blamed people for not being elected, for voting for the wrong people, for making false claims during the campaign, for not campaigning enough, for not having strong policies, for the state of our economy, and for cultural and religious differences that keep them from being like everyone else.

“I’m continuing to hear news on the upcoming election in the United States, in which everyone is to blame for immigration, unemployment, and violence. The news of more shootings have broken into international news. Everyone else is blamed for the violence while we continue to allow the gun laws to be open, our police forces to be militarized, and our population to be driven by racism and fear.

“We’re hearing the ramifications of the United Kingdom’s vote to leave the European Union, in which a lot of people were blamed for bad decisions, oppression, migration, political games.

“In the last couple of days, a damning report on the war in Afghanistan has been released. It casts serious doubts on the decisions leading up to the invasion of Afghanistan, and once again everyone’s blaming everyone else.

“We’ve been given a way to stop the blame game. Central to our faith practices is the act of confession, which goes far beyond merely confessing the last time we did something we shouldn’t have. Confession is a practice that can completely destroy the blame game because the only way to confront the evils of shifting the blame is to confess it, to stop the blame game dead in its tracks.

“So often we focus on forgiveness and forget the power of confession. So often we’re afraid of confessing and pass the blame to someone else (“It’s not my racism that’s is the issue, it’s their racism.”). We’re afraid of confessing because we don’t want to be taken to court. A few years ago, the Australian government apologized to the indigenous people of the land. The time had come, we had hoped, for the passing of blame to stop. We as a country needed to own up to our sins and to apologize, to confess.
“Perhaps we all need to start recognizing the power of confession and, as we’re led in the Lord’s Prayer, to spend some time focusing on confession rather than forgiveness. People are killed through violence and guns because of our lack of conviction. Racism still exists because we still have it in our hearts, our communities, our churches. People are poor and without housing because we’ve accepted it. Refugees are languishing in camps and in war zones due to our lack of conviction, the political leaders we vote for, and our willingness to allow people to suffer.

“Let us all confess our failure and our role in the world’s ills. I confess that I’m a part of the blame game. Lord, have mercy.” —Darren

MEET THE WRITER

Darren Wright is a Uniting Church Youth Worker serving in the Riverina Presbytery in New South Wales, Australia, as the Presbytery Education and Discipleship Worker. Darren has previously worked in congregational ministry, high school chaplaincy, and local government as a youth worker. His interests include music (Radiohead, Ben Harper, The National, Of Monsters and Men, Ryan Adams, Laura Marling, U2, All India Radio, Florence and The Machine), film (Inside Out, Captain America, Civil War, MegaMind, Harry Potter, How to Train your Dragon, Scott Pilgrim, Big Hero 6), TV (Jessica Jones, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Agent Carter, Dark Matter, Doctor Who, Big Bang Theory, Community, Agents of SHIELD), theology, pop-culture, working with young people in at-risk areas, and the connection of the church and theology with pop culture. Find out more at www.digitalorthodoxy.com.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

• snacks and coffee, tea, or water
• newspapers (optional)
• My Confessions, by Joel McKerrow (see “Plugged In” section)
• a candle and matches
• You will need to be prepared to confess.

PLUGGED IN

Cartoon
+ “Blame Others,” a cartoon from Naked Pastor (http://nakedpastor.com/blame-others/)

Books
  Book: (http://amzn.to/29iHlhA)  
  Leader’s Guide:  
    (download PDF at http://www.practicingourfaith.org/way-live-christian-practices-teens)

+ The Berenstain Bears and the Blame Game, by Stan and Jan Berenstain  
  Book: (http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/32300.The_Berenstain_Bears_and_the_Blame_Game)  
  Video: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKqcJZul90&feature=youtu.be)
Videos

+ My Confession, by Joel McKerrow
  Part 2. The Rich Part (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7gD9U-iXg0&feature=youtu.be)
  Part 4: The Masculine Part and The Epilogue (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8QIHz8gfjc&feature=youtu.be)

+ Brene Brown on Blame (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZWf2_2L2v8&feature=youtu.be)

CHECKING IN
As group members arrive, welcome them to the session. Have available snacks and something to drink. When everyone has arrived, invite group members to participate in one or more of the following activities.

> The Newspaper Blame Game
Light a candle and place it in the center of the room. Spread a few newspapers (the front section, the world news section, the political news section) on tables around the room. Ask group members to read through the papers to find articles that cast blame. Encourage them to look beyond articles on legal issues in which people are blamed for robbery or other crimes. Suggest that they try to find articles that lay blame on particular groups or individuals in connection with issues such as climate change, the economy, pollution, sexuality, morals, politics. Allow 5–10 minutes for this, and then invite volunteers to describe briefly what they found.

> The Cookie Jar Blame Game
Remember the old “Who took the cookie from the cookie jar” rhyme? (If you’re not familiar with it, check out https://youtu.be/OzKY5YHnOTg and/or https://youtu.be/Eh_fRQRAg0.) Invite the group to play this musical name game. (Yes, it’s a bit childish; but it’s a game based on blame.) Ask group members to sit in a circle. Explain that they will clap their hands on their legs once, clap their hands together once, and then repeat these motions over and over as you go through the rhyme as a group, passing the blame around the circle.

> The Berenstain Bears and the Blame Game
Read aloud the book or show the YouTube video of the book being read. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKqc1JzUt90&feature=youtu.be)

EXPLORING THE WORD
Scripture: Matthew 7

Then read aloud Matthew 7:1–5 (NRSV):

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.”


Questions for discussion:

What reflections from devozine this week inspired you, challenged you, strengthened you, or surprised you?

What logs might we find in our own eyes—as individuals, a church, a community, or a country?


Questions for Discussion:

What did you find challenging or interesting about My Confession by Joel McKerrow?

What in particular spoke to you? Why?

What in particular challenged you?

Where in My Confession did you recognize yourself?

Invite group members to work together to write a prayer of confession. Ask them to begin by considering the questions below and then to write a confession that includes their responses.

What would you confess as an individual? as a member of a church or denomination? as a member of the community? as a citizen of the country?

SHARING IN PRAYER

Invite the group to watch “The Epilogue” of My Confession, by Joel McKerrow, Part 4 (from 4:11 to the end — https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8QIIz8gfj&feature=youtu.be).

Place the candle in the middle of the room. Ask group members to gather around the candle and to read their confession together as a prayer. When they finish, invite them to pass the peace, speaking these words to one another: “The blame game must end. You are forgiven.”

TAKING IT FURTHER

• Invite the group to watch the video in which Brene Brown speaks about blame (https://youtu.be/RZWf2_2L2v8) and to continue discussing our propensity to jump to blaming others.

• If you are in the the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, or other parts of the world where people are likely to blame others for personal or political gain, keep your ears open. Perhaps keep a record of what you hear.
• If you’d like to hear more of Joel McKerrow’s work, head over to his website (http://joelmckерrow.com), listen to his album *Welcome Home*, or read one of his books. You can see much of his work online in his performance videos (http://joelmckерrow.com/Joel_Mckerrow/videos.html).

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