

What Missionaries Ought to Know about Victim Mentalities

Genesis 3:11-13 has an interesting conversation between God and his creation.

- (God to Adam) “Have you eaten?”
- (Adam to God) “The woman you put here with me...she gave me some fruit, and I ate it”.
- (God to Eve) “What have you done?”
- (Eve to God) “The serpent deceived me...and I ate.”

Both Adam and Eve admitted to doing what God had forbidden, but neither of them admitted that it was their fault. Adam basically said that it was God’s fault and Eve’s fault. Eve said that it was the serpent’s fault.

Refusing to take responsibility and blaming things on someone else goes back to the beginning. Blaming another person, blaming God, and blaming the devil are as old as the Fall into sin. This is the core of what is often called a victim mentality.

What is a victim mentality?

People with victim mentalities regard themselves as targets of the negative actions of others. They think and act as if that is the case even if there is no objective evidence that it is. Here are some other signs of a victim mentality in addition to blaming others and not accepting responsibility.

- Self pity
- Feelings of helplessness
- Focus on problems

- Complaining “If only...”
- Having a lot of “bad luck”
- Relationship problems with colleagues

Bad grades in school are because the teacher did not teach properly. Reports to the agency are late because the computer was acting up. A missionary cannot get excited about a project because the rest the staff are cliquish. He does not go to church because the preacher is boring, and the Bible classes are a drag. She cannot make friends because God made her too outspoken. Of course, these things may happen to anyone occasionally; however, that is not the case all the time.

What did Jesus do about someone with a victim mentality?

Although people often think of it as a physical healing, the problem with the man at the pool of Bethesda has many of the marks of what may have been his victim mentality (John 5: 1-15). Note that Jesus never touched him, and Jesus did not say anything about healing him. Jesus just asked him if he wanted to be healed (v 6).

The man did not answer Jesus’ question, but he gave “victim mentality reasons.”

- I have no one to help me into the pool.
- Someone else gets in ahead of me (v 7).

Jesus just ignored the man’s excuses and told him to pick up his mat and walk. (v 8). The man did just that! The only other thing that Jesus said to the man was to tell him to quit sinning or something worse may happen to him (v 14).

Jesus himself then became a victim of the Jews, they persecuted him (v 16), and they tried to kill him (v 18). Jesus was a victim,

but he did not adopt a victim mentality. Instead he offered them eternal life (v 19-47).

Are there “benefits” of having a victim mentality?

If the man at the pool of Bethesda had a victim mentality for 38 years, there must be benefits for having one. Here are some.

- Get more attention from others
- Others expect less
- Others give compassion and pity
- Others listen to a recital of problems
- No guilt feelings for not doing their tasks
- Not expected to take responsibility

Unfortunately, these benefits are often short-lived. People may get burned out from listening and giving. They may quit helping the one with a victim mentality. The man at the pool had no one to help him into the pool after so long a time.

How does a victim mentality develop?

Many people may be tempted to develop a victim mentality as they face normal problems in life, and there are multiple ways to fall into it. Here are some common ways.

- Children may see it modeled by their parents, such as seeing their father blame his lack of promotions on his boss.
- Real illnesses result in added attention, compassion, and help. Those receiving such things may never get fully “well.”
- Parents may continue overprotecting their children so that the children never become independent adults.

- When employees are treated unfairly at work, colleagues may bear part of the load, but they continue to do so too long.

Since the benefits are rewarding, some people just continue wanting the benefits and develop a victim mentality. They may not realize that such behavior ultimately results in rejection. The problem is not in accepting help when it is really needed. Problems develop when people make it their lifestyle.

What can people do about victim mentalities in acquaintances?

As individuals whose calling is to help others, missionaries often attract persons having victim mentalities. After repeated attempts to help such people, the missionaries may reach the point of being irritated and drained. They need to remember that it is not their responsibility to “fix” everyone and that enabling only makes things worse in the long run. Here are some things to try when approached by those with a victim mentality.

- After listening briefly and politely, say that you will keep praying for them.
- Set firm limits in a loving way, such as saying you have only five minutes to spare.
- Break eye contact and return to your task.
- Prepare for a guilt trip attempt on you and/or unfavorable remarks to others.
- Screen your calls and do not reply to emails or texts from the “victim.”

These actions will not instantly stop attempts at involving you, but over time they usually work if you do not enable their behavior.

What can people do about victim mentalities in themselves?

Problems like this can usually be solved by prevention, correction, or some combination of the two.

- Ask God to help you not develop a victim mentality.
- When you truly are a victim, resist the temptation to continue to want the pity and attention you are given.
- If you already have a victim mentality, ask God to help you, acknowledge that mentality, resolve to stop, and intentionally take steps to do so.
- Forgive those who seemed to encourage you to develop it, both those who caused your pain and the enablers who reinforced the mentality.
- Begin to live the new life God gives you; accept responsibility to live it; and ask others to hold you accountable.
- Focus on good things you have by comparing yourself with those who have less and by expressing your gratitude to others and to God.
- Involve yourself in helping others and bring glory to God.
- When you do slip back toward a victim mentality, do not give up. Instead, ask God to forgive you and help you as you try again.

How can one develop a victor mentality?

Missionaries are all victims of Satan's persecution, but that does not mean they must have a victim mentality. As we saw in John 15, Jesus did not develop one when he was persecuted for telling the man to pick up his mat and walk. Likewise, there is no need for missionaries today to develop one. They can

develop a victor mentality because though they may be victims, they are also victors!

A victor mentality is another way of thinking, of viewing the world from a different perspective. Rather than seeing persecution as negative, people with victor mentalities see it as a blessing as Jesus said in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). The Bible has many similar passages about victory and victors. Here are some.

- Jesus said that we would have trouble in this world but to take heart because he has overcome the world (John 16:33).
- Nothing, including trouble or hardship or persecution, can separate us from the love of Christ because we are more than conquerors through him who loves us (Romans 8: 35-37).
- Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).
- In Matthew 24 Jesus said that at the end of the age Christians would be persecuted, put to death, and hated by all nations because of him.
- Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

After changing the way they view the world, people can take the actions suggested in the previous section.

- Forgive others.
- Accept responsibility.
- Express gratitude.
- Help others.

We are victors, not victims!

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