



JAYSON GEORGES *and* MARK D. BAKER

MINISTERING
in
HONOR-SHAME
CULTURES

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS *and*
PRACTICAL ESSENTIALS



Many a Westerner has experienced the missed cues and social bruises that come with learning that another culture runs on an honor-shame operating system. In *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures* Jayson Georges and Mark Baker help us decode the cultural script of honor and shame. What's more, they assist us in reading the Bible anew through the lens of honor and shame, often with startling turns. Here is a thoughtful and practical guide to ministry within honor-shame contexts, complete with apt stories, illuminating insights and ministry-tested wisdom.



“Georges and Baker have taken the seeds of previous work on honor and shame in the environment of the biblical world and in modern cultures and cultivated them into fruitful insights and guidance in the areas of theology, crosscultural engagement and, especially, missions.”

DAVID A. DESILVA, Ashland Theological Seminary

“Every message-bearer working in non-Western cultures needs to read and apply the insights and principles of this book if they are to avoid the typical cultural blunders too often committed by too many. Within are crucial insights for effective crosscultural ministry.”

MARVIN J. NEWELL, Missio Nexus

“Intelligent, informed and culturally perceptive, this resource will impact the theory and practice of missionaries and local leaders in unprecedented ways. . . . Those working in the global world of today must read this book.”

CHRISTOPHER FLANDERS, Abilene Christian University

“The text is full of examples that help the reader understand how differently honor-shame codes play out in the understanding of salvation and discipleship. . . . Sherwood and I strongly recommend this book to people trying to understand a way of structuring the world that is very different from the one in which they grew up.”

JUDITH LINGENFELTER, Biola University



JAYSON GEORGES (MDiv, Talbot) lived in Central Asia for nine years doing church planting and microenterprise development. He is the author of *The 3D Gospel*, founder and editor of Honor Shame.com, and creator of the Culture Test. He serves as missiologist in residence at an evangelical organization, developing tools and training for Christians working in honor-shame contexts.

MARK D. BAKER (PhD, Duke University) is professor of mission and theology at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. He served as a missionary in Honduras for ten years and has written a number of books in English and Spanish.

ISBN 978-0-8308-5146-1



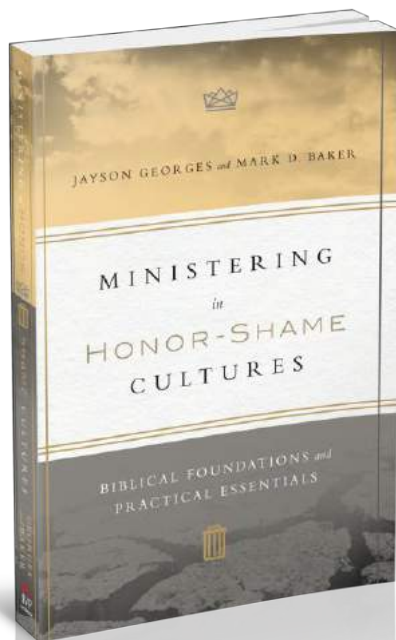
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RELIGION / Christian Ministry /
Missions

This document is Chapter 7 of the book
Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures.

This chapter features 8 essential guidelines for relationships in honor-shame cultures.
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 IVP Academic
An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	7
1 A World of Shame	11
PART ONE: CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY	
2 The Heart of Honor-Shame Cultures	33
3 The Face of Honor-Shame Cultures	49
PART TWO: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY	
4 Old Testament	67
5 Jesus	91
PART THREE: PRACTICAL MINISTRY	
6 Spirituality	117
7 Relationships	134
8 Evangelism	162
9 Conversion	183
10 Ethics	200
11 Community	217
Appendix 1: Key Scriptures on Honor-Shame	247
Appendix 2: Biblical Stories Addressing Honor-Shame	255
Appendix 3: Recommended Resources	259
<i>Notes</i>	261
<i>Author Index</i>	283
<i>Subject Index</i>	285
<i>Scripture Index</i>	287

RELATIONSHIPS

*It takes effort to learn how to honor the dignity of others,
which significantly enhances the experience
of being in a relationship.*

DONNA HICKS

Honor everyone.

1 PETER 2:17

RELATIONSHIPS ARE CENTRAL TO MINISTRY. Yet as we recounted in chapters one through three, by operating according to the logic and values of our default culture we have often unknowingly sown hurt and alienation in honor-shame contexts. We interpreted our actions as positive, yet we inadvertently shamed people. Logical actions from one frame of reference can create barriers to relationships when interpreted from a different frame of reference. For example, not giving to avoid dependency or paternalism (the Western logic) can be interpreted as “no gift means no relationship” (the honor-shame logic). In this chapter we share some guidelines for relationships in honor-shame contexts. Recall how honor and shame function as the grammar of most cultures; this is how we “speak their language” relationally.

Learning to address issues and resolve conflict while maintaining relational harmony is crucial for living in honor-shame contexts, lest we

irreparably burn bridges. The first three suggestions in this chapter—find a cover, reconcile symbolically and become a client—will aid in resolving conflict honorably. The final five suggestions—give gifts, be pure, guest well, be a patron and give face—will help to secure and strengthen relationships. Taken together these form “Eight Commandments” of relationships in honor-shame societies.

It has become commonplace for leaders in business endeavors or military operations to be briefed on aspects of honor and shame. But Christians should not approach the topic simply as tips for gaining a hearing or influencing people. Such a utilitarian approach belittles people and their culture.¹ Without genuine love and humility our actions devolve into degrading self-interest and half-baked exploitation. This chapter does not present cultural gimmicks to manipulate circumstances or bend people to our will, but culturally meaningful avenues to form relationships that embody the gospel. Of course, in part what distinguishes this chapter from a crosscultural business book is that the ultimate goal is much different. God instructs his people to honor others. So we not only explore ways honor can be used to enhance relationships but also ask how we can honor others through our relationships.

Considering the dual realities that God is on mission to honor people, and that honor always comes through relationships, mediating God’s honor relationally is a vital component of Christian witness. The reality is that people encounter the honor and glory of God through relationships with believers. Honoring relationships are at the heart of the gospel. Here we present relational ways to tangibly incarnate God’s love and honor into cultures operating by honor and shame.

USE A COVER

David Augsburgburger recounts an incident involving a European physician working at an Indian hospital. The physician urgently needed lab results for an essential surgery, but the Indian technician in charge of the hospital laboratory was sick. So the European physician sent a servant to the lab technician’s house to get the lab keys, but the lab technician refused to give the keys to a subordinate. So in anger, the physician walked to the technician’s house, demanded the keys, and ran the lab tests himself. He finished the surgery and

forgot the whole incident until he noticed that his relationship with the lab tech was strained.² The Western physician had unknowingly dishonored the technician—twice. First by disregarding his work status by sending the servant for the keys and second by directly demanding the keys.

The physician may have been more successful, medically and relationally, by finding a cover. A cover is an indirect way of making a request so as to minimize conflict and avoid exposing others to potential shame. Instead of directly addressing the issue at hand, a cover reframes the problem to the person *while* addressing the issue. How could the doctor have received the keys *and* honored the lab technician at the same time?

One option would have been for the doctor to personally visit the sick technician at home, perhaps bringing a meal of some kind, and broach the issue like this: “Sir, I know you have many responsibilities at the lab and everybody depends on your work. We want to help you so you can rest and fully recover. If we could have the keys, maybe we could help you by doing some of the lab studies on your behalf. That way you could return without being behind in your work.” An angry demand for the keys exposes shortcomings, whereas a cover requests the keys while maintaining a relationship of honor. When people sense their shame is being exposed, they naturally become resistant and defensive. Exposure spoils the relationship and accomplishes little, but using a cover can avoid conflict altogether.

The objective is not merely to obtain the lab keys but also to leverage the situation to honor others. A cover regards the relational impact of our approach. The Western focus on efficiency and truth neglects relationships and people in times of conflict. “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15) is not merely confronting somebody in a polite voice, but appropriately honoring them in all our interactions.

There are many ways to resolve an issue without exposing the person to shame. Instead of asking someone, “Why are you late?” with an accusing tone of voice, simply ask, “Are you okay?” They are probably aware of the time, so mentioning their tardiness serves little purpose. Or when you must decline an invitation, consider using a “relational yes.” Instead of directly saying no to their invite, you can choose to affirm the relationship with a polite euphemism for no, such as a simple “Oh, thank you!” These are basic ways to address issues without exposing people, an essential element of

building relationships of trust and honor in many cultures. Most importantly, pay attention to and learn from how non-Western people tactfully navigate thorny issues. Their social diplomacy is often quite admirable!

Some readers may feel discomfort employing such indirect communication. Using a cover to resolve a conflict may appear to lack integrity and honesty. Remember, the purpose of a cover is not to avoid the problem but to avoid unnecessarily shaming people and to preserve relationships while addressing the issue. Using a cover is hardly deceptive in Majority World cultures; everybody fully understands, and respects, the intention of your indirect request. If someone knows what you mean when communicating indirectly, it would hardly be deception or lying.

Our communication must keep one eye on the issue and one on the relationship. We must consider the relational impact of our communication. Paul instructs, “So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18). If you expose someone to shame, you will likely sever the relationship. And regardless of our intentions or convictions, we are responsible for the relational impact of our words on other people. Hebrews exhorts us to “make every effort to live in peace with everyone” (Heb 12:14 NIV). When our speech offends other people, our first response should be assessing *our* role in the conflict. Living peaceably with all depends on me, not them. If we prioritize relationships, we will accept other forms of communication to honor and value other people.

RECONCILE SYMBOLICALLY

After the above incident between the European physician and the Indian lab technician, their strained relationship became more and more obvious. Seeking reconciliation, the physician privately spoke with the technician. Desiring to make amends the doctor asked, “Is there a problem?” Even though the lab technician denied any problem, the relationship was never the same. Though the doctor had the right intentions and desires, his attempt to reconcile had limited effect because of how he tried to make amends.

To restore the relationship, the doctor should have sought ways to remove the technician’s shame and repair lost face. People can reconcile damaged relationships with symbolic gestures that confer honor. For example, pub-

licly praising the technician at the next staff meeting or inviting him to lunch would contribute to restoring the relationship more than verbally apologizing. Without mentioning the incident, these gestures address the problem of dishonor and symbolize a reconciled relationship.

Isfara was living in the city, away from her family. Her conversion from Islam to Jesus brought shame to her family. When Isfara's brother was at the mosque during Ramadan, certain men, burning with religious zeal, began discussing those who left Islam. Isfara's name came up, and the men told her brother that he must kill her, or they would kill him and his family. They insisted that the killing must be public as a warning to others; they suggested dragging her behind a horse through the village. So Isfara's brother called her with an ultimatum: convert back to Islam and marry a man they choose for her, or face a humiliating death. Her brother threatened to find her in the city and take her back to the village. A few months later Isfara's siblings called to invite her home for a meal. She feared it was a trap, but trusted her family anyhow. Her brothers and sisters hosted her to an elaborate dinner. They said nothing about Jesus or the death threats and had a good time dining together. Isfara understood the meal was their "olive branch" and reacceptance of her. The food symbolized reconciliation.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the father reconciles without verbalizing a word to his returned son, but through symbolic clothing and food. "The father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate'" (Lk 15:22-23). The entire village knew the father fully restored the son's family status with the robe, ring, sandals and feast.

In Central Asia, offended parties sometimes reconcile by purchasing and giving an article of clothing. In situations of reconciliation, symbolic actions often speak louder than words, so are often the best route for restoring a relationship.

BE A CLIENT

Recall Alisher (chapter three), the neighborhood deputy who always announced to others my financial contributions to the neighborhood. Throughout his lifetime of public service, Alisher developed a wide network

of influence and relationships that could rectify many problems. Over time, I learned how to position myself as a client under his patronage. Once he finished introducing me to others with grandiose words, I would declare all the ways he used his influence to help our team. Rather than deflect my praise, Alisher held his head up high and let me speak. This made me a grateful client who could count on his future help/patronage. So when it was time to sell our ministry building, I asked Alisher to help find a buyer. Before showing the building to each prospect he introduced me to, I purposefully recounted all the ways Alisher had helped the community. He was eager to help and live up to his role as a benefactor in the community. Of the dozen interested buyers, Alisher introduced us to all of them except two, and was glad for the opportunity to do so. Praising and thanking Alisher cultivated a “friendship” of mutual benefaction, thus committing him to help us solve a problem.

Becoming a client may be another culturally relevant way to resolve a situation. This means creating a patron-client relationship, wherein you are the client requesting help from a patron. You deliberately put yourself under another person without whose help you would lose face. Becoming a client utilizes the social network and capital of your acquaintances to address a dilemma. Patrons are expected to help clients with their problems. In his book *Cross-Cultural Conflict* Duane Elmer explains how this works. “Generally, if one holds the power to keep another person from being shamed, that person is morally obligated to do something to keep shame from coming to the other. However if the person does not act to save another’s honor, she or he is in danger of losing face and being shamed.”³

Though it may seem counterintuitive for a “privileged Westerner” to function as a client in a “developing country,” this works because notions of hospitality include assisting foreigners in their country. People relish the opportunity to serve as a benefactor (especially toward a foreign guest), for they acquire honor for themselves through the process; having a client brings honor to the patron. A patron relationship can be carried through thanks (as per the above story), or with a gift or direct appeal (as below).

Steve worked as a Christian aviator in a Latin American country where the government regulated the fuel supply. His station ran out of gas, and there was none available on the open market to purchase. Steve had a

previously scheduled meeting with the official responsible for managing fuel in his region. During that meeting, he brought with him the largest cabbage from his personal garden at home. Steve respectfully presented the cabbage to the official, then in the course of the conversation mentioned his need for more gasoline. Steve's unique gift communicated respect and thanks for future patronage. A gift can position you as a client politely requesting assistance.

We (Jayson's family) wanted to put wall-to-wall carpet in our bedroom, but it was only sold in the capital city. Transporting a roll of carpet on the small plane to our city was an issue. When we arrived at the airport with our twenty-foot-long roll of carpet, the check-in attendants immediately balked. They stated that the excess cargo would prevent the plane from lifting off. The attendant, in a tone of fabricated concern, suggested \$50 might lighten the plane's load just enough to lift off. My mom was visiting at the time, so happened to be flying with us. I pointed her out in line, then leaned in quietly and said, "Please help me. My mom is visiting our country for the first time. She bought this carpet as a gift for us, and I will be embarrassed if we can't get it home. I am afraid she will be upset or think badly of our country. Can you help me?" Sensing the potential embarrassment, he agreed. A verbal appeal positioned me as a client in need of his benefaction (and spared me from explaining the airport's enigmatic policies to my mom). Asking for help to avoid embarrassment or shame invokes a patron-like obligation. Gifts, thanks and appeals can cultivate a client-patron relationship that can be beneficial for solving problems.

Obtaining services through relational channels does feel ethically questionable at times. Is it right to curry special relationships to gain special access? Certainly not in all instances. Human sin can turn systems of patronage into outright corruption. But patronage is not always negative. We suggest a balanced view of patronage-client exchanges. As I (Jayson) reflected on my experiences, I realized my initial objections to the structures of patronage often came more from my own pride and ethnocentrism—I assumed my cultural system for exchanging goods and services was superior, and that their system of patronage must be reformed.

Over time I realized patronage simply uses honor as a form of payment instead of cash. Is it wrong to use a different currency to buy something

(assuming, of course, justice is not perverted and no one is harmed)? Usually not. Having come to appreciate the nuances of patron-client systems, I now feel rather callous during many economic exchanges in America—I give the cashier money and take their items without any sort of relationship. That may be legal, but not nearly as honoring. Rules and laws ensure equality and predictability, but can dehumanize and minimize interaction. In contrast, patron-client systems foster relationships and community—you have to know people to get things. Becoming a client requires setting aside Western ideals of self-sufficiency and humbly depending on other people for help.

Yes, patron-client systems can be time-consuming, frustrating and even outright corrupt—we know from years of personal experiences. Yet we believe there is a missional upside to a balanced view of the system. Becoming a client can be a way to communicate honor and form relationships in many cultures of the world.

EXCURSUS: ADHERE TO CULTURE OR TRANSFORM CULTURE?

Some aspects of honor-shame cultures fail to represent God's ideals. Because of this, navigating relationships and situations in those fallen areas is stressful and challenging, especially for cultural outsiders. How should Christians engage the honor-shame elements of culture?

For example, “reciprocity” is a key concept in honor-shame contexts. Reciprocity is a type of social debt—if I give you something, then you must repay to avoid shame. For instance, reciprocity is expected when hospitality is offered. That is one reason hospitality generally flows between people of similar status. A person of high status and means would not invite a poor person of low status to a meal, not only because the presence of a low-status person at the table would reflect poorly on the host, but also to avoid shaming the person. The invitation would put the low-status person in the awkward position of being obligated to reciprocate but being unable to do so. Yet Jesus advocated practicing hospitality without a focus on reciprocity.

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor,

the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (Lk 14:12-14)

When does a missionary in an honor-shame context disregard, follow or transform the norms of the culture? This is an important question to reflect on in relation to the guidelines of this chapter. We will take a brief step aside from describing the guidelines to share our perspective.

There are three general approaches to engaging culture in regard to the sort of issues addressed in this chapter.

1. Ignore the host culture (defaults to ethnocentrism).
2. Learn the host culture to facilitate communication and relationships.
3. Learn the host culture to transform it and engage people redemptively.

The negative examples in this chapter, and other places in the book, reflect the first position. Whether out of ignorance or knowing rejection, the person in the first category lives according to Western values and practices. The second approach leverages the patterns built into honor-shame societies to foster relationships. Knowing how to function in relationships on their terms is foundational, but is not the complete picture.

Approach three recognizes that God calls Christians at times to go beyond the calculus of the cultural systems in order to honor people as God intends. Christians must not only know how to navigate relationships honorably but also be someone who is generous in honor and respect in all circumstances. Jesus calls us to model a type of honor that extends beyond the cultural system. The kingdom of God rooted in God's radical grace transforms the cultural systems of honor and shame.

Approach three does not reject the honor-shame paradigm; it works within it to transform aspects of it. Therefore, you cannot skip from approach one to approach three. You have to learn the culture (approach two) before you know when to go beyond the culture (approach three). We must underscore that it is not just breaking the rules as an uninformed person would (approach one). We still operate within the realm of honor and shame in order to communicate a greater honor rooted in an ethic of the kingdom.

Jesus' example of table fellowship illustrates approach three. In chapter five we noted Jesus' table ethic with the sinful women (Lk 7) and the sinners

(Lk 15). Jesus did not categorically reject the cultural systems of hospitality and table fellowship by boycotting all meals (approach one) just because of how the Pharisees abused the structure to falsely honor themselves and inappropriately shame others. Rather, Jesus honored the Pharisees by eating with them (approach two), then went beyond the cultural games to reveal the kingdom by welcoming those who were not invited (approach three).

If you choose to purposefully break the social rules to bear witness to kingdom values (approach three), it is important to explain your actions. If you purposefully do something “countercultural” to communicate kingdom values but do not verbally explain the action, then people will think you are a clueless foreigner (at best) or a disrespectful and shameful person. Westerners assume that a countercultural action alone will automatically convict people of their false honor systems and attract them to Jesus. But it rarely works that way; actions intended to be “countercultural” get interpreted by the default honor code as “wrong” or “shameful.” One must seek the opportunity to explain, “We do this because Jesus. . . .” This pattern of “action-plus-explanation” follows Jesus’ example when he associated with the sinful woman (Lk 7) and the sinners and tax collectors (Lk 15). This verbal explanation is one of the main things that separates approach one from approach three (at least in the eyes of nationals perceiving our actions) and further bears witness to God’s true kingdom honor and challenges people to rethink their honor code.

Learning to engage culture with approach two is not merely a stepping-stone to approach three. Approach two is itself a part of kingdom relationships in many positive ways, so should not be left behind. The examples of this chapter focus mostly on the second approach, but we will occasionally bring in some examples of the third approach as they relate to other aspects of relationships in honor-shame cultures. (Chapter eleven will explore the third approach in more depth.)

GUEST WELL

On Sunday morning at a church service in the United States an Anglo-American pastor was teaching about humility from Philippians 2:1-5. To illustrate how we must “look to the interest of others, and not just ourselves,” he recounted a personal story of visiting a house fellowship of Japanese

American Christians. As he was an older pastor, the group of young Japanese Americans invited him for encouragement and teaching. Upon arrival, he entered the house and removed his shoes. But in the entryway only one pair of slippers remained, and they were pink ladies' slippers. When a younger, Japanese American host saw the problem, he offered his own slippers to the guest. But the pastor humbly refused to accept the host's slippers and wore the pink slippers the entire evening, believing this action "looked to the interests of others."

When he finished the sermon illustration, my (Jayson's) wife turned to me with wide eyes saying, "Oh, no! He did the exact opposite of what he intended." The Japanese American hosts likely felt embarrassment and shame anxiety that evening as their older, honored guest was wearing pink slippers. The pastor undoubtedly had the right intentions, but actually disgraced others by not allowing them to be good hosts. One of the greatest sources of shame people face is not hosting well.

It may seem counterintuitive, but receiving honor as a guest is an important way to honor people. Westerners have strong reservations about receiving special treatment. Insisting on Western expressions of humility—not taking anything or showing any need—prevents hosts from fulfilling their obligations. When hosts are unable to provide for guests, they sense shame. Not receiving hospitality indicates the host has nothing of value to offer you and suggests they are socially inferior. A great way to honor others is to receive their honor. For that indicates they possess an honor to grant, which makes them feel secure and equal in the relationship.

Receiving honor is only half of guesting well; the other half involves reciprocating appropriate honor to your host. Be incredibly grateful; lavish thanks on them for their generosity and hospitality. Say it many times, until you think you are being annoying! Tell them it was incredible; eat lots. Being a good host does not mean demanding and hoarding honor, but facilitating the flow of honor in all directions. The goal is mutual honor. This involves thankfully receiving the host's honor.

Playing the part of a good guest occurs not just in homes, but in any social context where you are the outsider. If you are an expatriate living in a foreign country, people will generally treat you as a guest even in public interactions. So the strategy of guesting well includes receiving honor in a variety of

socially appropriate ways, such as honorific titles. Since the hierarchical aspects of many cultures contradict Western egalitarianism, Westerners often seek to sidestep honorific titles, thinking it will help the relationship—“Oh, just call me Joe! We’re buddies!” But rejecting honorifics creates relational confusion and face anxiety, as they are unsure what social role is most appropriate for the relationship. When the efforts of Majority World people to communicate honor encounter your firewall, they are socially insecure and unsure how to relate. Being a good guest in all cultural contexts can help grant honor and build relationships.

SHARE GIFTS

Our family owned a Soviet-era apartment in Central Asia. When our teammates agreed to buy it, I assumed the transaction would be simple. But two weeks before we left the country I learned that I needed to get a document affirming there were no liens against the property before transferring the title. Getting documents from government officials often feels like walking into a den of hungry lions. My standard approach was to play hardball with the clerks, but my confronting, demanding and arguing accomplished little.

With all the packing and farewells to leave the country in two weeks, I lacked the emotional margin for a logistical hassle. So I prayed for wisdom. The next day, a local Christian told me how his organization’s administrator navigated bureaucratic channels—before any official meeting, he would simply present a chocolate bar and say, “Here, this is for your tea break.” So I hatched a plan.

I went to a local market and purchased a chocolate bar with fancy wrapping, knowing packaging and presentation were significant. At the government office I submitted a request for the title document. The official’s terse “return next week” gave me little confidence the document would be prepared in time. I wanted to pull the chocolate bar out of my bag as a thank-you gesture, but my conscience rattled me as though it were an illegal drug deal. My heart raced with nervousness. I looked around to confirm there were no video cameras, then quietly placed the chocolate bar on the table and discretely whispered, “This is for your tea.”

I thought the transaction was just between us two. He took the chocolate bar, smiled at me, then announced to coworkers, “Everybody, look at what

this guy gave me!” He thanked me lavishly before others. (He obviously knew how the culture worked!) My heart sank. I was afraid that others would accuse me of bribery and corruption for giving a chocolate bar, but the opposite took place. The colleagues came over in jolly spirits to greet me and admired the fine chocolate. (When they offered me a piece of the chocolate, I found it rather unpleasant tasting. But fortunately, the interaction depended on the status conferred by the chocolate more than its actual flavor!)

Amid the celebratory work break, the government official voluntarily called his superior in the back office to get immediate approval. “Come back in two days!” Such customer service shocked me; the motto in post-Soviet countries tends to be “the customer is always *wrong*.” When I returned in two days, there was a long line for receiving documents. I made eye contact with the previous official, and he promptly walked over to retrieve the document for me. I walked out of the office amazed, thinking, *I have lived here nine years, and just now figured out how to navigate the bureaucracy!*

My gift to the official publicly implied, “You are somebody worthy of respect. I choose to recognize your power and prestige. Now could you please show your authority by helping me?” Where institutions and governments are unreliable, people barter honor to form relationships and access new networks of influence. A gift overcomes the dehumanizing commodification of anonymous transactions in our modern world. Gifts assert a person’s unique worth. (One must be cautious not to conflate gifts and bribes. A gift seeks to relationally honor people with customary presents, whereas bribes manipulate a person to pervert justice through abnormal contributions.)

Remember that gifts are symbolic—the point is the relationship and the social exchange, not the actual object. So give gifts of symbolic value. Whether it is with a new refugee family at your church, your ESL students or neighbors in your apartment building, gifts are a great way to foster relationships crossculturally. Part of gift-giving also includes graciously receiving gifts, even in moments when the gift appears too excessive and grandiose in light of the giver’s modest income.

Honoring people with a gift for their accomplishments or to form a relationship is fine and appropriate. But Christians must realize that people

merit honor because they are created in the image of God, not for what they can do. There is a place for simply honoring people because they are present with us. People's presence, as a reflection of God's presence through the *imago Dei*, is something to be honored in its own right.⁴ This is where Christ's followers can go beyond the normal rules of gift exchange and bear witness to the reality of God's kingdom.

Gift-giving in honor-shame cultures can establish a variety of relational models, so it is important to know what a gift means. A gift to a superior functions as a client's thanks to a benefactor. If the recipient is a social equal, a gift reaffirms your common group membership and peer relationship. But giving a gift to a person unable to repay establishes you as a patron helping a client, and may even create an overwhelming sense of obligation to repay. In some instances it may be better to not give gifts because people are so calculated about keeping things balanced. For example, I (Mark) have temporarily stopped giving oranges from our tree to the Mexican family next door, because every time I do they appear to feel obligated to give something in return. (But the Mexican/Salvadorans on the other side do not.) The same gift can carry different significance in different contexts. By properly understanding these social undercurrents, a Christian worker committed to steward their resources wisely can use gifts to appropriately honor people of all classes.

BE A PATRON

Brian and his family were Americans called to ministry in Africa. As their family integrated into local life, their African friends began asking for material help. Each story had a unique reason, but they typically ended with an appeal for money. As their relational network grew, more and more people asked for material assistance. Though Brian always desired to help, the persistent requests became exhausting—emotionally, financially and relationally. He even began to notice physiological effects whenever he heard a knock at the gate; he dreaded the encounters. Years of financial requests created unbearable levels of stress and anxiety.

Brian's situation is hardly unique. Many Westerners find themselves caught in systems of patronage, and are never quite sure how to navigate the financial requests and relationships. Westerners are viewed as potential pa-

trons from the moment they arrive, whether they realize it or not.⁵ Their wealth and status makes them the new “Big Man” from whom people come to expect things. This new role leads to relational confusion, tension and stress in relationships with locals. I (Jayson) recall feeling used when people asked for money, so would get resentful and angry toward them. From within my Western schema, I never considered the requests for money as opportunities for deeper relationships and mutual honor. Since patronage is the primary structure of relationships and economics in Majority World cultures, one must understand the mechanics of the patronage systems.

Social etiquette prescribes a protocol for potential clients seeking benefaction. To prepare the way for a positive response from the patron, clients must pay their respects to a patron by visiting and offering token gifts. This allows time for both sides to properly vet each other, sort of like dating. After an acceptable period of paying respects, the potential client asks for material help. A contribution from the patron formalizes a long-term patron-client relationship.⁶ This is the patron-client dance. So, if someone offers you a gift, expect a relational opportunity (i.e., patronage) to follow! Granting every request is not recommended, even if feasible. Christians are never obligated to fulfill expectations of patronage, but we are freed from sin to serve others through socially accepted channels of honors such as generous patronage.

Being a patron is not just handing out gifts like Santa Claus. Patronage involves fulfilling a multifaceted social role. Patrons are expected to do many things: adjudicate community problems, lead conversations, initiate relationships, host large events, as well as pedestrian things like dressing respectfully and sitting at the correct seat at a meal. A patron is not a sugar daddy, but a respected person in the community who acts accordingly.

Tim was an American missionary who founded a business-development center. After the staff Christmas celebration at the business center, everybody began cleaning up the dining room by clearing the tables and putting everything away. Wanting to help out, Tim grabbed the sponge and began washing the dishes. Upon seeing him, the cook employed at the business center gasped in horror and demanded he stop. Surprised by the cook’s forcefulness and shock, Tim handed over the sponge and stepped aside.

Tim intended to communicate appreciation by helping with the dishes, but his actions were viewed quite differently. For the boss/patron to do manual labor suggested she had failed at work; she felt quite embarrassed that Tim had to do her job. In hindsight, Tim realized he could have shown his appreciation and honor to her through the honor-shame dynamic of patronage. For example, noting her diligent work before colleagues or hiring a taxi to drive her home that night might have better communicated appreciation and honor to her. Patronage means using the role of respected leader who blesses and benefits other people.

The story above invites the question: Would it be sufficient for Tim to adopt the cultural systems (approach two) to communicate honor? Or does the kingdom of God point to something else, to a particular focus on honoring the person in ways beyond the cultural system, as in approach three? Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet seems instructive here (John 13:3-20). At that time foot-washing was a task reserved for non-Jewish slaves, not a respected teacher such as Jesus. It was shameful and humbling to wash another person's feet. For Peter the thought of Jesus washing his feet was unacceptable. "You shall never wash my feet." Being fully aware of those social dynamics, Jesus' washed their feet to demonstrate his love and set an example of servanthood. Jesus even told them "What I am doing you do not understand now" (Jn 13:7; cf. Jn 13:12), but Jesus nevertheless instructed the disciples to follow his example of washing one another's feet. How does such kingdom humility and servanthood properly translate in contemporary situations? There is no simple universal answer, but we think it is important to ask. Sometimes it means choosing approach two, other times choosing approach three. Tim's situation, at the least, points to the need of some explanation, rather than simply assuming that an honor-shame native will interpret the action positively through a Western, egalitarian framework.

Approach three does not necessarily mean rejecting the patron-client dynamic, but it can mean being a different kind of patron. To employ household help is to enter a type of patron-client relationship. In Honduras the patron is expected to provide a meal for the worker. Generally hired people ate in the kitchen or on the back steps. My (Mark's) family fulfilled this expectation of a meal, but we purposefully invited the maid or gardener to join us at the family table at mealtime. We continued in a patron-client relationship, but

through subversive table fellowship we also cultivated deep friendships that continue to this day.

Antonio was a Honduran friend and partner in ministry. Through participating in various workshops and experimentation on his own small farm, he had become a gifted community-development worker in the area of sustainable agriculture—something I knew next to nothing about. We lent and gave him money at various points. He clearly felt indebted to us in a patron-client way. I did not openly reject his comments or actions that treated me as patron. I did, however, intentionally seek ways to level the relationship by treating him as my gardening consultant. Every time he would visit, I would take him to look at my compost pile and garden. I asked him for direction and advice. I always thanked him and underlined that any success in the garden was due to his guidance. When we visited him I would always ask for a tour of his farm and inquire about new methods. I told him he was my teacher and sought to take the posture of student, as a different kind of patron.

Jesus called his followers to go beyond patron-client reciprocity. One way to do this is to transform the aim of patronage. The world uses social capital from patronage to promote their own honor (e.g., build public monuments in their name, or leverage it for political gain). But Christians should creatively use patronage for authentic relationships and kingdom purposes. Sharing financial resources and meeting materials needs cultivates relationships for God's glory. Benefaction is stewarding God's finances for God's purposes. Instead of receiving the praise and honor for themselves, Christian patrons should direct clients' loyalties to Jesus so his name is honored as the ultimate Patron.

Paul illustrates this very approach in Philippians 4. Recall the situation: the Philippians provided a generous financial gift to Paul's ministry. Paul acknowledges their exceptional generosity (Phil 4:10, 14-15), but clearly qualifies his gratitude in order to reframe the relationship (Phil 4:11-13). Paul transforms the paradigm of patronage by bringing a third party into the picture—namely, God. This effectively counters any temptation the Philippians may have to position themselves as patrons who deserve “repayment” from Paul. Philippians 4:17-20 directs the Philippians toward a God-centered view of patronage in four ways. First, the return for the Philippians' gift is

not Paul's clientage but the spiritual fruit God credits their account. Giving involves its own spiritual reward (Phil 4:17), which happens to be far greater than any Paul could offer. Second, their gift was not simply a financial contribution to Paul, but "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18). The Philippians were giving to God, not Paul. Third, the Philippians were not big-shot patrons distributing largesse, but were themselves recipients of God's benefaction "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). The Philippians were kindly thanked as mediators of God's provision, not praised as the original source of the gift. And fourth, all the praise and glory from the financial transaction belongs to God (Phil 4:20). For he, and not the Philippians, is the ultimate patron who deserves all the praise. Paul demonstrates how true patronage among Christians should be radically God-centered. All benefactions begin with God's provision and end with God's glory. Such a reframing of the financial transaction does not dismiss the patronal qualities of the relationship, but rightly locates it in the broader context of God's purposes.

A key part of functioning as a patron is learning to accept various forms of repayment from clients. Instead of expecting people to repay financially, we must consider the assets they can offer. After several years in Central Asia I realized people were unlikely to repay a loan financially, but they could repay me in other ways. After I gave Erkin (a skilled handyman) an old computer to practice his English, I called him to fix a broken pipe in the basement of our apartment building. Upon completion, I asked him how much his services cost. He said, "If all your neighbors are paying together, the rate is \$30. But if only you are paying then it is nothing; I owe you." Erkin was glad to repay me with his time and talents. Along the same vein, the greatest asset people in collectivistic societies possess is their network of acquaintances. If you are traveling to a new town, ask one of your "borrowers" if they have a relative in that town who could help you. Even if they do not know of a relative there, they will likely find someone to meet you. Granting you access to their social web expresses their thanks and loyalty for your patronage.

Westerners must recognize the nonmaterial assets and capital people do possess—wealth is not just financial in nature. If you find yourself to be the patron, ask the question—what could this person offer to others (or to the

kingdom)? In the context of a relationship, this question dignifies by affirming the innate assets and abilities people do possess. This may involve opening ways for people to repay you. Edgardo was a very poor Honduran. When crisis came he would ask us to borrow money, but there was little hope of his paying it back. We suggested that Edgardo wash our car as a form of repayment. Any time he came to our house we would let him wash the car. (In those years the car got washed much more than normal!) The point was not having a clean car, but affirming Edgardo's dignity. He had something to offer to the relationship. (Of note, years later when Edgardo finally got a good job, he borrowed a much greater amount of money from us to start building a house. He paid it all back, borrowed again twice more and paid it all back again.)

Patronage is also vital in discipleship relationships with Christians. When you enter patron-client relationships by helping people materially, they become more open to your spiritual influence. Patronage creates access into people's lives. This allows Christian patrons to instruct and mentor other believers. Christian clients become the patron's spiritual "children" (see 1 Cor 4:14). Patronage offers a framework for transmitting values to disciples in many non-Western societies. It is the "indigenous style of discipleship practiced naturally by many national leaders."⁷

Danyar was a young Christian whom I (Jayson) thought I was discipling. We would meet weekly over tea to read the Bible and pray together. He was happy to read the Bible, but subtle mentions of financial needs gave me the impression he was more interested in material things than spiritual things. After several weeks of our meeting together, Danyar asked for a significant amount of money to pay his college tuition. Feeling uncomfortable mixing money with discipleship, I declined the request and suggested he rely on family for the money. After that conversation he stopped appearing for our weekly discipleship meetings. At the time this confirmed my suspicions about Danyar's insincere motives; I thought, *He really was only interested in my money*. In hindsight I realize my actions likely surprised Danyar. He probably walked away wondering, *I thought we agreed to be friends. Why is he reneging on our relationship now? If he purposefully shamed me like that, I guess Jayson does not want to associate with me any more*. Being naively

unaware of patron-client dynamics adversely affected that discipleship relationship with Danyar.

There are certainly potential dangers of mixing patronage with discipleship. Without an actual relationship between people, the system can easily produce “rice Christians”—people jumping through the patron’s “Christian” hoops for material rewards. This unhelpful dependency undermines mutual dignity. Another legitimate concern about patronage is the typically low level of accountability. Clients often feel obliged to overlook sins or malpractices to preserve the patron’s image and maintain access to resources. Patronage is a structure for relationships, but never an excuse to skirt problems.

These common issues often cause Westerners to dimly associate patronage with corruption and abuse. Patronage should not be rejected as a deplorable system of dependence, but an acceptable model of interdependence (which, like all social systems, gets warped by sin). Jesus’ words “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you” (Lk 22:25-26) do not condemn patronage in its entirety, but the self-promoting abuses. The patronal system of that day flowed down from the Roman emperor; Jesus pointed toward a transformed patronal system that flowed from the ultimate patron—God as merciful Father.

The Bible tells us about several good patrons. God functioned as a patron toward Israel. As discussed in chapter four, the covenant at Sinai established a “suzerain-vassal” (i.e., “patron-client”) relationship between Yahweh and his people. Jesus’ ministry was also benefaction.⁸ One of Peter’s sermons in Acts summarizes Jesus’ life like this: “He went about doing good and healing” (Acts 10:38). The word for “doing good” (Greek *euergeteō*) was commonly used in Greco-Roman inscriptions for public benefactors. In fact, the Greek word for “savior”—a common New Testament title for Jesus—was synonymous with “benefactor” in the ancient world.⁹ And in the early church, key Gentile leaders served as patrons by opening their large homes for gatherings and financing Paul’s ministry (e.g., Rom 16:2). Paul and Peter even encouraged affluent Christians to benefact by promising them public recognition (Rom 13:3; 1 Pet 2:14).¹⁰ Multiple figures in the Bible, including Yahweh and Jesus, utilized patronage systems to mediate salvation to the

world, and this practice was advocated by the apostles. Serving as a patron can sometimes (not always) be a means to exemplify God's kingdom. These social dynamics are essential for properly using one's influence and resources for God's purposes in honor-shame contexts.

BE PURE

Oscar ministered to Asian refugees in America. One day he ran across the street of his apartment complex without putting shoes on to visit a Nepali neighbor. The host was dismayed. He glanced at Oscar's feet and said in broken English, "You are shameful. You cannot come in." Oscar realized walking barefoot was unclean, so he wisely began wearing shoes. Disregarding purity concerns risks shaming you and others, so is a significant area of consideration for our relationships.

Purity matters, particularly in Muslim and Hindu contexts. Society often defines people (and their message) based on their personal cleanliness. Christians in ministry must account for this cultural reality. Your appearance reveals the value of your message, so present yourself accordingly. Collectivistic cultures think holistically, so do not separate the message from the messenger. A Muslim student group in Jayson's city tried to discredit Christianity by telling fellow students that Christians wore dirty shoes. In their minds the logic was simple—because they do not clean their shoes, Christians are dirty people and unclean in God's eyes; therefore, Muslims should not associate with such dishonorable people lest they risk becoming defiled themselves. This cultural logic associated cleanness with truthfulness. Western culture rarely makes this connection, but the link between cleanliness and godliness is notable in purity-observant cultures.

Americans commonly observe the *public* filth in other countries: trash, smog, roaming animals, dirt floors and so on. Ironically, Americans' *personal* uncleanliness often surprises people in the Majority World. They reason, "If they are from a rich country with big homes and fancy cars, why do they wear T-shirts and old jeans? Are they homeless?" Paul Hiebert says Westerners need to learn to understand how other cultures see purity and pollution, and to reexamine their beliefs of "clean" and "dirty" to be more culturally sensitive. This typically means combing your hair, not sitting on the ground, dressing decently and washing your hands before meals.¹¹ The

point is not to behave like pompous royalty, but to carry yourself respectfully. It may also be prudent to abstain from “unclean foods,” as defined by the host culture. For example, Christians in Arab contexts often refrain from pork for the sake of gospel witness.

Personally observing cultural purity rules can be important for relationships and ministry (approach two), but Christians can point to an even deeper level of purity and cleanness. My (Jayson’s) wife hosted a gathering for Christian ladies. Kulfuza, a new believer, was asked to share her Christian testimony. As she recounted her conversion story, she specifically praised God for the newfound ability to ride public transportation without judging people based on the cleanliness of their shoes. For her, only a miraculous regeneration of her heart could override the cultural circuitry equating dusty shoes with dishonorable people. As God’s Spirit cleansed her heart as a Christian, she was able to look beyond the surface-level dirt into matters of the heart to see people as God sees them.

The question of whether Christians should observe purity regulations of other religions is controversial. We do not pretend to resolve the issue here, but only suggest a greater awareness of the honor-shame dynamics associated with purity practices. To categorically reject all the purity codes of one’s pre-Christian religion could turn Christian converts into social lepers. Violating social taboos risks dishonoring cultural identities and alienating Christians from their birth community.

A contextualization model that strives to honor people *and* God seems wise and biblical. For example, Jesus grew “in *charis* [i.e., favor, grace] with God and man” (Lk 2:52 NIV; cf. Prov 3:3-4). Paul took pains “to do what is *kalos* [i.e., beautiful, proper, good], not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man” (2 Cor 8:21 NIV). One missionary emphasizes, “If Christians living in Southeast Asia are going to faithfully honor God, they will need to understand how to live honorably in their local community.”¹²

Navigating the tensions is rarely easy. Even the earlier church struggled to define acceptable purity lines. The first church in Jerusalem needed over a decade to work out acceptable dietary and circumcision practices for Gentile Christians (Acts 11–15). The process of defining what purity codes are acceptable for Christians to practice should follow this biblical rubric—it honors God (Rom 14:6) and honors people (by not distancing them from

community, cf. Rom 14:13-21). For example, a church-planting team working among observant Muslims decided to offer containers of water for people to perform ablutions before prayer, but clearly taught that such ablutions were not “a meritorious requirement in Christianity.”¹³ This maintained the balance of not dishonoring or defiling people in their cultural milieu, while also honoring God as ultimate source of ultimate purity and cleanliness.

Regardless of Christians’ convictions about contextualization, we must never conflate ritual purity with spiritual purity. The only thing making someone pure and clean before God is being in Christ. God declares all believers in Jesus clean (Acts 10:28; Rom 13:18). Only Jesus—the Holy One of Israel—makes a person pure. Observing social purity codes never affects one’s standing before God, but it can eliminate potential stumbling blocks in our witness of the gospel.

GIVE FACE

We were having visa problems, so I (Jayson) went with our administrator to the department of migration for an official meeting. As we talked with the government official our administrator noticed one of her former students interning in the office. To score a few social points, she pointed out, “Oh, I taught her. I bet she does a great job for you!” The official’s next words were shocking to me. With the intern sitting nearby, the official went off in a loud, overbearing tone, “Her? She is awful! She can’t even write her name! She doesn’t even know how to use the copy machine, and it only has one button! She doesn’t know anything!”

What provoked such a harsh outburst? Many interactions in honor-shame cultures function like gladiatorial contests for securing and displaying honor. People engage matches of verbal jousting to win honor. When a person’s status is threatened or challenged, they must respond to defend their honor. In this situation the government official maintained her social precedence by making it public how she did not benefit from us. She was the superior in the relationship, and we were dependent on her for favor. Such “challenge-response” interactions highlight a feature of honor-shame cultures—communication is about face, not just facts. The goal is not to efficiently relay information or complete a task, but to procure status.

When Westerners understand how status or face is the goal, they can better interpret social interactions that otherwise confound. These include public fistfights, tit-for-tat blood revenge, politicians humiliating inferiors on national television or Christian pastors outlining all their spiritual qualifications during an introduction. Reflect on an incident or two that seemed strange or confusing—do you think face played a role in it? Recognizing the social dynamic of face is important for understanding culture, but also engaging people. Christians can also be intentional to communicate face in personal interactions with people. We give three examples of “giving face.”

When Jayson’s team finally found a buyer to purchase our building, we made a startling discovery. The title documents we had for the building were bogus. A government worker had given us unregistered documents and kept all the money. Through a long process, our friend Erkant sacrificed greatly to help us resolve the problem and retain the building. We wanted to thank him appropriately, so deliberately considered how to communicate honor. At the farewell banquet for all of the business’s employees, we called Erkant up to the front. Before everyone, I commented on his strength (he was a competitive bodybuilder), highlighted his fruitful ministry, noted his sacrificial help, thanked him for being our “roof” (the slang term for patron), then presented him with a gift. As we presented the gift from the newest store in town, everyone oohed and aahed. We tried to communicate more than appreciation; we purposefully honored his generosity and friendship. Whether in formal meetings in an office or casual conversations on the street, purposefully communicating face goes a long way.

Sam was an American missionary teaching at a Bible college in Haiti. One day a local student came into his yard looking quite sick. When Sam asked what happened, the young man recounted how he felt disrespected by another missionary. His disgrace was visibly palpable as he said, “I can go three days without food, but without respect, I can’t live.” In that moment, Sam prayed with the Haitian student and shared how Jesus restores his honor. His face went from being totally downcast to brilliant after the prayer, and he left with the biggest smile. Sam wisely realized the root problem was a lack of face and respect. Restoration and healing came as Sam shared God’s Face with the Haitian student.

In chapter five we mentioned the *60 Minutes* episode featuring the *Africa Mercy* ship to explain the full significance of Jesus' healings. The patients who arrive onto the hospital ship suffer from severe facial deformities because of tooth enamel that does stop growing. *Africa Mercy* performs reconstructive surgery to remove the tumor and, quite literally, give people a new face. The relationships between medical staff and disfigured patients extends beyond the typical cultural calculus of observing society proprieties, and bears witness to radical kingdom values (approach three). The countercultural element of the medical ministry is plainly evident. CBS journalist Scott Pelley tells the nurse, "You know that there are some people who are watching this interview who are saying to themselves, 'I could never do what she does. Those poor people are terribly disfigured. I can't look at them.'" With a tear in her eye, the nurse responds with full conviction, "People have been saying that to these people their whole lives. And someone has to look at them. Someone has to look them in the eyes and tell them that you're human and I recognize that in you. It gets to the point where you don't see that anymore. You don't see the tumor. You can just see the person's eyes. Of if they only have one eye because the other one is a tumor, you find their eye and find a way to connect with them."¹⁴ The way *Africa Mercy's* ministry gives face to people goes beyond society expectations to expresses kingdom realities.

GOOD HONOR AND BAD HONOR

We have tried to outline the main "rules" of relationships in honor-shame cultures. Hopefully these guiding principles equip readers to relationally mediate God's honor to Majority World peoples. However, navigating cross-cultural relationships is challenging. Knowing how and when to observe cultural rules is often quite confusing. Sometimes you should "be a patron"; other times you should "be a client." Sometimes you should give a gift; sometimes you should withhold the gift. It takes time (as well as mistakes) to develop an intuitive sense for how to act. Despite these challenges we have found people are often gracious when they perceive love and sincerity. So take heart!

Learning about honor and shame sometimes handcuffs crosscultural Christian workers. They always strive to avoid offending other people. But

simply avoiding all offense is not the ultimate goal of Christian ministry. The goal of our authentic relationships is not to give people any type of honor, but God's true honor. Not all forms of honor are good. We must distinguish between "good honor" and "bad honor."

Good honor is a gift of God's common grace for those who live wisely. "The wise will inherit honor, but stubborn fools, disgrace" (Prov 3:35; cf. 3:3-4; 21:21). People in Central Asia often "boasted" of the beauty of their country, of their large family size or of their self-built house. These are all good things we should affirm as legitimate grounds of honor, since they edify other people and develop community. God himself thinks highly of honor and wants to bless people with it, assuming they use it for the common good.

Bad honor comes at the expense of other people. Status derived by subjugating or marginalizing others is false and illegitimate in God's eyes. Bad honor not only degrades other people but also dishonors God by disrespecting his creation. When people claim such a false honor for themselves, it should be confronted. In chapter four (Old Testament) we discussed how God's hand of judgment involves both honoring and shaming. In the Gospels, Jesus not only blesses people with honor (Mt 5) but also curses the Pharisees with shame (Mt 23). Though it must be done with humility and wisdom, an aspect of our vocation as gospel-bearers is calling out, or shaming, bad honor.

Ken was a Christian development worker living in Central Asia who was led by God to confront bad honor during a taxi ride between two cities. In the car with Ken was the driver and two other men. Then a young girl occupied the fifth and final seat. As they drove along, the three men began talking about the various women in their lives, which naturally made the young gal uncomfortable.

Then they addressed her, "Come to my house. I will feed you. It will be a relaxing time." They began discussing among themselves how good it would be to stop the car and spend time with the girl. She was visibly uncomfortable. Proud of their manly intentions, they turned toward Ken and asked, "So what do you think? Do you like that idea?"

Ken replied, "Well you could do that if you want to. It's your choice. But it reminds me of a riddle."

“Oh yeah?” they asked. “What riddle?” And Ken told them this story:

So he walks out of his house onto the street. As he’s walking along confidently, he looks over and he says to himself, “Wow, she looks good. I think I’ll have her.” So he goes over and does his thing with her. He keeps strutting down the street, and he sees another and says, “Mmm, I like her. I think I’ll have her too.” So he goes over and fulfills his desires with her. Then he sees some unclaimed food, so takes some for himself. Then a third time he sees a good looking one, takes her, and then carries on. Who is he?”

At this point the three men are glowing in anticipation, naturally thinking, “Wow, what a real man!”

Then Ken revealed, “He is a dog!”

Immediately the car was silent. “So, you can choose what you do and how you live. As for me, God created me a human, and I’m choosing to live like one.” There was no more salacious talk.

The parable challenged the passengers’ basic worldview by redefining their notions of honor and shame. Ken did not just reactively shame the shamers by saying something like, “You perverts are losers! Stop bothering her!” By helping them reinterpret their own codes of honor, Ken invited them to leave behind their degrading passions and become honorable people themselves. He subverted the prevailing system of false honor, and challenged them to realign their cultural honor code with God’s (à la Jesus’ parable of the wicked tenants in the vineyard in Mk 12:1-12).

Knowing when, and how, to confront false honor requires great wisdom and boldness, as Ken’s story illustrates. The social context and God’s Spirit help Christians determine when and how to properly honor people. Sometimes they should “play the game”; other times they should “leave the game.” Yet Christians must remain aware of the rules and know the relational consequences of their choices.

Our primary objective is for Western readers to grow aware of these social guidelines for relationships, as they are often unwritten and uncertain. Observing the social rules all the time is never an obligation, but honoring people *is* a commandment from God, and that must be done in a way that

makes sense to them. Building relationships in culturally appropriate ways is a freedom and blessing we possess as God's children.

Although what we have described in this chapter is of fundamental importance, much more is needed. For instance, the examples in this chapter focus on personal relationships with individuals. In chapter eleven we will examine honor-shame themes in the church—a community of believers. Also, Christians are called to do more than simply avoid shaming, build relationships and honor others. Having explained “good honor” and “bad honor,” we must introduce a third type of honor—the “eternal honor” that only comes from being in God's family through Jesus. How can Christians proclaim God's eternal honor as good news to people? We now turn to evangelism in honor-shame contexts.

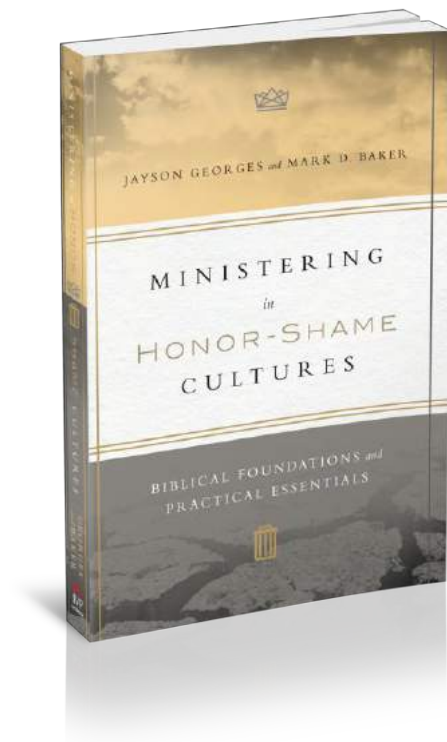
DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What tangible gestures communicate “face” to people in your context?
2. In light of the above suggestions, what is the most challenging aspect of crosscultural relationships for you?
3. Recall a time when money and finances became an issue in a crosscultural relationship. How did the realities of honor-shame and patronage affect that situation?
4. Recall a time when you had conflict in a crosscultural relationship. How did notions of “face” and honor influence the reconciliation process? Should you have responded differently?

This document is Chapter 7 of the book
Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures.

This chapter features 8 essential guidelines for relationships in honor-shame cultures.
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