

# MISSION FRONTIERS™

ISSUE 37:1 | JAN/FEB 2015

A MAGAZINE OF THE U.S. CENTER FOR WORLD MISSION

## THE POWER OF HONOR

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## THE GLOBAL GOSPEL

Achieving Missional Impact  
in our Multicultural World



WERNER MISCHKE

FOREWORD BY  
SAMUEL CHIANG & STEVEN HAWTHORNE

Thorough,  
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touching,  
timely,  
theologically  
sound while  
demanding  
some  
theological  
turns, and  
teeming with  
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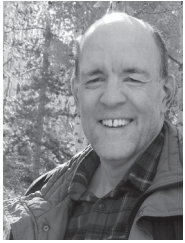
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# RESTORING WHAT WAS LOST



**RICK WOOD**  
/ EDITOR, MISSION  
FRONTIERS

I want to start out by thanking the four guest editors who filled in for me during my recently completed sabbatical. They all did a great job for which I am very thankful. Thank you also to those *MF* readers who remembered me in their prayers during my absence. It is good to be back.

## IN THE BEGINNING: AN HONORED POSITION

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in the earth. God said it was good. God then created mankind in His image. “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky....(Genesis 1:26-27) So God created mankind in his own image. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” (Gen. 1:31) We were created to rule the earth as God’s exalted representatives. In Psalm 8:5 it says, “You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.” Clearly we were created with the intention that we would walk with God and live lives of honor, reflecting the glory that God had given to us. But then came the Fall.

Adam and Eve dishonored God by disobeying Him and we have been on a desperate search ever since to reclaim the lost honor and glory we had with the Father in the beginning. But God’s plan is to restore that glory and honor through our relationship with Jesus Christ. So the world has a choice, a futile effort to gain and maintain honor—to make a name for ourselves—or to pursue the honor that God alone can restore to us. The first path leads to sin and destruction, the other to salvation and a restored relationship with God. As it says in Psalm 62:7, “My salvation and my honor depend on God.” For more on this see Steve Hawthorne’s article starting on page 26.

The history of mankind is one of people seeking to gain honor, power and glory for themselves and to jealously guard whatever honor or position they hold. Some, like the Pharaohs of Egypt or the Caesars of Rome, have actually commanded that they be worshiped as deity.

Even when people don’t go this far, there seems to be a driving desire in the hearts of people from most cultures to seek honor and to avoid shame. Everyone seems to want to make a name for themselves. Even in the West many want to be a celebrity, thinking this will bring meaning and satisfaction to their lives.

These are powerful cultural forces that dominate the world and its peoples. The Islamic cultures are well known to be centered around honor and shame. The Asian cultures are well known for trying to “save face.” But as we highlight in this issue, most cultures around the world are affected by the issues of honor and shame.

The critical question then arises, “if honor and shame is such a powerful dynamic in the thinking of people in a myriad of cultures, *why does our presentation of the Gospel not reflect this cultural and biblical reality?*”

## PRESENTING THE GOSPEL THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR

We all come to scripture with the cultural lenses that have been provided to us by our pastors, theologians and systematic theologies. In the West we come from a legal/guilt perspective on the gospel. We have our “Four Spiritual Laws,” through which we are declared righteous because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. This is a true and accurate understanding of the gospel. But as we have seen, it is also biblically true and accurate to understand the gospel from an honor and shame perspective.

The world is prepared and waiting for an honor-based gospel that will communicate to their hearts more effectively than the legal/guilt gospel that we have most often taken to them. How much more responsive will the world be if we present a gospel that addresses their dominant concerns? We will never know until we try.

## THE T4T (TRAINING FOR TRAINERS) PROCESS AND THE DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY METHOD: HOW DO THEY DIFFER?

For years now we have been featuring stories in *MF* on both the T4T Process and the Discovery Bible Study Method. Both have been actively used by various mission agencies to great effect in fostering the development of Church-Planting and Disciple-Making Movements

around the world. They have many things in common because they both follow principles of training disciples to obey all Jesus commanded. But there are some differences as well.

Our regular Kingdom Kernels columnist and author of *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*, Steve Smith, joins Stan Parks in laying out the common elements and the important differences in part one of their two part series on this topic starting on page 36. Whatever method you choose to use, our focus must be clear. Our job as followers of Jesus is to make disciples who disciple others and plant new churches—and to do so in every people on earth. These two methods of ministry have been fruitful around the world in turning ordinary believers into disciple-makers and church planters. As we mentioned in the March April 2014 issue of *MF*, these methods are having a

similar effect in the U.S. in fostering emerging movements. So there really is no good excuse for us not to start doing it ourselves. We must all break free from our church culture of passivity and move forward on mission with God.

### A NEW DAY IS DAWNING

Four years ago we featured the growing influence of David Platt, author of the best selling book, *Radical*, which went on to sell over 1 million copies. We featured him in the Nov-Dec 2010 issue because he is the most effective and eloquent spokesman I have seen for reaching the unreached peoples since Ralph Winter. Now he has been elected President of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. I congratulate him on this new position. I will be watching with great eagerness to see how his passion for the unreached

will transform the IMB and their mission efforts around the world. This is a highly strategic position from which he can have great influence in mobilizing millions to be on mission with God. The IMB has a rich heritage of innovation in mission on behalf of the unreached peoples. They have been key players in fostering growing movements around the world. It is my hope and prayer that the Southern Baptists under David Platt's leadership will continue to press forward boldly with well-researched best practices and innovative approaches to reaching the unreached. Please join me in praying for David as he seeks to lead the IMB to even greater achievements. See page 40 for an interview where David shares his thoughts about the future of Southern Baptists on mission with God. 

## A THREE FOLD CORD

For this issue of *MF* we have tapped into a conversation among three prominent blogger/authors who have contributed significantly to this issue. One has produced an on-line culture test, and each has produced a complementary gospel presentation that is “honor/shame” sensitive, a rich list of resources on their blog for further study, and one or more new books.

### WERNER MISCHKE

WernerMischke.org  
The Father's Love  
<TheFathersLoveBooklet.org>  
*The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in our Multicultural World* (2015) Honor/shame dynamics in the Bible and how these inform our interaction with honor-shame cultures around the world, especially

unreached peoples. Available on GlobalGospelBook.org, and on Amazon.com, etc.

### JACKSON WU

JacksonWu.org  
How does God seek “face”?  
(YouTube: <youtu.be/P\_TRdLOq\_OU>)  
*Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (EMS Dissertation Series) (2013) How honor-shame should influence our understanding of salvation. Available on MissionBooks.org and Amazon.com  
*One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (January 2015) A practical, biblically faithful and culturally meaningful method for contextualizing the gospel in any context. Soon to be available on MissionBooks.org and Amazon.com

### JAYSON GEORGES

HonorShame.com  
Back To God's Village (YouTube: <on.fb.me/1xmIJAD>)  
*The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame and Fear Cultures* (2014) Helps Christians proclaim the gospel to the world's three primary culture types. Available on HonorShame.com and Amazon.com  
Online culture type test:  
HonorShame.com/theCultureTest

This issue of *MF* also is also indebted to Dr. Steve Hawthorne, whose article is undergirded by his PhD Dissertation: *Let All the Peoples Praise Him: Toward a Teleological Paradigm of the Missio Dei* <gradworks.umi.com/35/67/3567957.html>



+ FEATURE

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## JAYSON GEORGES

Jayson Georges (M. Div., Talbot) served in Central Asia for 9 years, and is now Missiologist-in-Residence at an evangelical organization. He has published *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* and developed [TheCultureTest.com](http://TheCultureTest.com) (a free, online culture survey) to equip Christians living in honor-shame contexts. Jayson blogs at [HonorShame.com](http://HonorShame.com) and lives with his family in Atlanta, GA. Follow @HonorShame. Email [info@HonorShame.com](mailto:info@HonorShame.com)

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# WHY HAS NOBODY TOLD ME THIS BEFORE?

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## THE GOSPEL THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR

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**A**s our team in Central Asia was preparing to host a training for national church-planting partners, I took advantage of the opportunity to dialogue with the six national believers on our team about honor and shame. We examined the biblical story through the lens of honor and shame for over an hour, and they were animated and encouraged to see how the Bible speaks so directly into their honor-shame culture.<sup>1</sup>

Aisha has served in campus ministry and church planting, and the gospel she learned from Western ministry organizations emphasizes forgiveness of sins without reference to the problem of shame. She quickly recognized the implications of this new paradigm, and her eyes watered up as she begged to know, “Why has nobody told me this before? I have shared with my sister many times that God forgives her sins. But she just says her shame is too great for God, and I have had nothing to say to her. Why am I just learning this now?”

Aisha’s question highlights a glaring missiological problem. If most of the world (especially most unreached people

groups) live and think in terms of honor and shame, and honor-shame themes are inherent in the Bible, then why is honor and shame so absent in our missiology and theology? Why do we fail to present people in shame-based cultures with the honor-restoring salvation available in Jesus? These questions have huge missiological significance for the completion of the Great Commission.

### HONOR-SHAME DYNAMICS AMONG UPGS

Roland Muller notes that “much of the 10/40 window is made up of shame-based cultures.”<sup>2</sup> And anthropologists and missionaries increasingly observe that collectivistic and group-oriented cultures, most notably in Arab and Asian contexts, construct their worldview and society upon the pivotal values of honor and shame. This is in contrast with individualistic Western societies that emphasize personal guilt, legal innocence, and retributive justice.

Most people in collectivistic societies structure their life to avoid shame and maintain honor. This influences where they sit at a meal, how they introduce themselves, who they

marry, where they work, and how they receive the message of Jesus. All of these behaviors are influenced by concern for maintaining a positive reputation and harmonious relationships in the community.

## OUR TUNNEL VISION

Does the gospel address shame? Does Jesus Christ grant honor to those who believe in him? Absolutely! The Bible is saturated with honor and shame dynamics. Majority World peoples in shame-based cultures may intuitively understand facets of the Bible better than seminary-trained Westerners.

While studying the Bible together I asked my friend Kairbek, a Central Asian believer, “What kind of person was Adam?” anticipating a philosophical or ontological answer. Kairbek replied, “A person of great honor!” Being from an honor-shame culture, Kairbek implicitly understood the great honor God gave Adam at creation—blessing, land, a multitude of descendants, food, the divine image, naming privileges, and a wife. For these reasons, Adam and Eve “felt no shame,” even though they were naked (Gen 2:25). Kairbek opened my eyes to see new aspects of God’s plan in scripture.

Beginning from Genesis 1, honor and shame run through

the entire story of the Bible. “The term guilt and its various derivatives occur 145 times in the Old Testament and 10 times in the New Testament, whereas the term shame and its derivatives occur nearly 300 times in the Old Testament and 45 times in the New Testament.”<sup>3</sup> Yet leading theology books continue to emphasize guilt and courtroom motifs over shame and community motifs. In fact, I have encountered indices in theology books with multiple references to “Shakespeare”, but no references for “shame.”

## THE BIBLE IS COVERED IN SHAME (AND HONOR!)

Western theology is “shameless,” yet the Bible is saturated with references to shame and honor:

- “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more” (Isa 54:4).
- “My salvation and my honor depend on God” (Ps 62:7).
- “Whoever believes in him [Jesus] will not be put to shame, [with] honor to those who believe” (1 Pet 2:6-7).

# THE BIBLE’S STORY FOR HONOR-SHAME CONTEXTS

(adapted from *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* by Jayson Georges)

## CREATION

God has existed for all eternity in full glory and honor. He is an honorable King, a Father who provides for the entire family. He is pure, faithful, and glorious—the essence and source of all true honor.

To magnify his glory, God created the world and spoke life into being. God created Adam and Eve, crowning them with glory and honor. As God’s esteemed co-regents, they received authority to rule over creation in God’s

name. They walked naked, but were not ashamed.

## SIN

But Adam and Eve were disloyal to God. They forfeited divine honor to pursue a self-earned honor. Their disloyalty to God created shame, so they hid and covered themselves. Moreover, their sin dishonored God, and God lost face. Because Adam and Eve brought shame upon everyone, God banished them from His presence.

As Adam and Eve’s descendants, the human family inherited their shame. And having lost everything—our spiritual face, family, name, and status—we became engaged in a perpetual effort to construct a counterfeit honor for ourselves. The tower of Babel is a powerful illustration of our continuing drive to exalt ourselves and make a name for ourselves apart from God.

## ISRAEL

God then initiated a plan to restore His honor and remove shame from humanity. He covenanted to honor

Abram with a great name, as well as land, blessing, and many children. As a great nation, Abraham’s family would become God’s instrument to bless—or honor—all nations.

When Abraham’s descendants suffered in slavery in Egypt, God delivered them from their shameful bondage, and Israel became God’s most prized nation—the apple of his eye and the treasure of his heart. God made a special covenant to honor Israel if she would honor him with loyalty and obedience to his law.

God intended this covenant to produce honor, but Israel’s disloyalty in turning to other gods brought God dishonor among the nations, and even more shame to Israel. As an unfaithful spouse, Israel caused God to lose face. And instead of bringing God’s blessing and honor to all nations, Israel further dishonored God by becoming ethnocentric—treating Gentiles as inferior and unworthy of God’s family.

Like Adam, Israel was chosen for honor but ended up in shameful exile. Yet assurances and instances of divine



New Testament professor David deSilva tells us, “The culture of the first-century world was built on the foundational social values of honor and dishonor.”<sup>4</sup> So it is natural that biblical writers proclaimed the gospel in the language of honor and shame. The centrality of honor and shame emerges even more fully as we consider the biblical motifs of glory, name, adoption/family, and purity/defilement. And the stories of Genesis, Esther, many Psalms, Daniel, Luke, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Revelation, and even Romans center around God’s status-restoring salvation.

## WHERE DOES THE ROMAN ROAD LEAD US?

Western theology leads us to read Paul’s epistle to the Romans as a legal letter explaining heavenly acquittal of our individual transgressions. But Romans rarely uses courtroom terms like guilt (0x), forgiveness (1x), or innocence (1x). Rather it places much greater emphasis on shame (6x), honor (15x), and glory (20x). In Romans, Paul addresses the corrosive ethnic divisions between Roman Christians (Jew-Gentile and Roman-barbarian) by replacing their false claims to honor with their new basis for true honor in God, equally available to all who trust in God’s honored Messiah.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Romans confronts “group righteousness” (claims to superiority over other

groups), not just “works righteousness” (pride in one’s moral goodness). In this context, Paul reveals sin as the shameful manipulation of cultural systems that dishonors God (1:23-24, 2:23-24, 3:23). The trajectory of “The Romans Road” leads to a salvation of divine honor, eternal glory, and membership into God’s family (2:7, ch 4; 8:18, 10:10-11).<sup>6</sup>

## SEEING THE FOREST IN THE TREES

Biblical authors communicate their from-shame-to-honor theology through various literary genres:

- propositions—“No one who believes in him will be put to shame” (Rom 10:11),
- metaphors of status reversal—“You are no longer strangers and aliens” (Eph 2:19),
- narratives of honorification—Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Daniel, Jesus’ healings, etc., and
- covenants of promised honor—Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), David (2 Sam 7:7-14).

The biblical view of honor and shame runs even deeper than these passages suggest. Understanding honor and shame does far more for our message and ministry than help us better interpret Jesus’ parables or repackaging our evangelistic

exaltation (e.g., Ruth, David, Daniel, and Esther) foreshadowed a greater intervention by God to rescue the human family from shame and restore its honor.

## JESUS

Although Jesus was eternally glorious and honored in heaven, he became flesh to deliver us from our shame by embracing and destroying it. Jesus’ healings and acceptance of marginalized people restored their dignity and honor. He was so full of divine honor that those who touched him were cleansed and accepted. His teaching proclaimed the true, eternal code of honor. And by loving and accepting all people regardless of their reputation or ethnicity, Jesus undercut society’s false honor code and offered divine honor to humanity.

Jesus’ life fully honored God, but his ministry threatened the earthly honor of established leaders. So they shamed Him—publicly and gruesomely. Jesus was arrested, stripped, mocked, whipped, spat upon, and nailed to die

on a cross. Thus he broke the power of shame by embracing and overcoming it rather than retaliating. The cross restored God’s honor and removed our shame. Face was restored.

God then honored Jesus’ obedience by raising him from the dead and exalting him to the highest place of honor—seated at God’s right hand with a name that is above every other name. By fully honoring God and mankind, Jesus has reversed the shame that Adam and Israel had brought on God and humanity.

## SALVATION

Today, apart from Jesus, our own defiled and disloyal hearts add to the shame we inherit from our forefathers. Apart from God, mankind continues seeking to manufacture a false honor—often through shaming others or boasting in the superiority of our family or group. This pursuit of false honor dishonors God and leads to disgraceful conduct—abuse, anger, gossip, boasting, racism, violence, war, etc.

Yet Jesus provides a better option.

When we give our allegiance to Jesus, God removes our old status as unclean and shameful orphans and adopts us as his own pure and honorable children. We who find our honor solely in following Jesus are freed from the games of social manipulation, status construction, and face management. And we who embrace the shame of the cross with Christ are assured by His Spirit of eternal resurrection glory.

Membership in God’s family is not based on ethnicity, reputation, or religious purity, but on our familial allegiance to the crucified Messiah. And becoming part of God’s family empowers us to welcome and accept others. As followers of Christ we are able to honor others and glorify God since we possess God’s eternal honor and empowering Spirit. Upon Jesus’ return, unbelievers will be stripped of all worldly honors and banished to everlasting shame, while we who believe will receive crowns of eternal honor as God’s glory fills all creation.




presentations. Ultimately, the Bible's teaching about honor and shame reveals the very heartbeat of God to remove shame and restore honor for the human family. God intends humanity to become his family, bearing his honor. This stands at the center of his salvific purposes for the nations. We must not miss the forest—God's mission to gain honor for himself by honoring those who embrace his kingdom—for the trees—biblical texts about honor. From Adam (Gen 1:27) and Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) through to Jesus (Phil 2:4-9) and his Church (1 Pet 2:6-10), the historical and eschatological purpose of God's salvation is to honor his people (Rev 21:17-22). Throughout salvation history *Missio Dei* is the restoration of human "face" and status. Saving people from shame to honor establishes God's reputation as the only true source of honor and glory. Ultimately the story of the Bible is about God's honor and "face," not just ours.

In application of this understanding, our team in Central Asia practices a missiology of "honorification" to connect Central Asians longing for honor with God's offer of honor. Through our relationships, evangelism, discipleship, and business platform, we aim to join in God's mission of blessing all people with Christ's eternal honor.

### A MISSIONAL HARMONY

The scriptures were written in a socio-cultural milieu of honor and shame, so we don't need to "contextualize the gospel" in terms of honor and shame! That has already been done. We must simply overcome the Western assumption that the legal framework of the gospel is the only biblical framework of salvation.

If the nations long for honor and God's plan is for the nations to seek and find their honor only in Him, then Christian mission involves playing the role of matchmaker. The Good News of Christ's salvation, as outlined in the Bible, already speaks to unreached people groups and their deep longing for honor. It is a perfect match, just waiting to be made! 

- <sup>1</sup> See a five-minute video on this theme, and other related videos, at [HonorShame.com/videos](http://HonorShame.com/videos).
- <sup>2</sup> Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Xlibris, 2001), p. 20.
- <sup>3</sup> Timothy Tennent, "Anthropology: Human Identity in Shame-Based Cultures of the Far East," in *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 92.
- <sup>4</sup> David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 23.
- <sup>5</sup> Krister Stendahl, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Robert Jewett, "Honor and Shame in the Argument of Romans," in *Putting Body & Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs*, eds. Virginia Wiles, Alexandra R. Brown, and Graydon F. Snyder (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).
- <sup>6</sup> Jayson Georges, "From Shame to Honor: A Theological Reading of Romans for Honor-Shame Contexts," *Missiology* 38, no. 3 (2010): 295-307; Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*, EMS Dissertation Series (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2013).

# WHY HAS THE CHURCH LOST “FACE”?

## EXAMINING OUR BLIND SPOT ABOUT HONOR AND SHAME



### JACKSON WU

Jackson Wu (Ph.D, SEBTS) teaches theology and missiology for Chinese church leaders in Asia. He will soon publish his second book *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (William Carey Library, 2015). His other publications and blog posts can be found at [JacksonWu.org](http://JacksonWu.org). Follow him @jacksonwu4china [JacksonWu@hushmail.com](mailto:JacksonWu@hushmail.com)

Once again I found myself in the same conversation. The missionary shook his head and said, “That’s fine if you want to talk about ‘face’ as a gospel ‘bridge.’ But, ultimately, you have to talk about ‘law’ if you are going to really share the gospel.” Why do people find it so hard to understand the importance of honor-shame in gospel ministry?

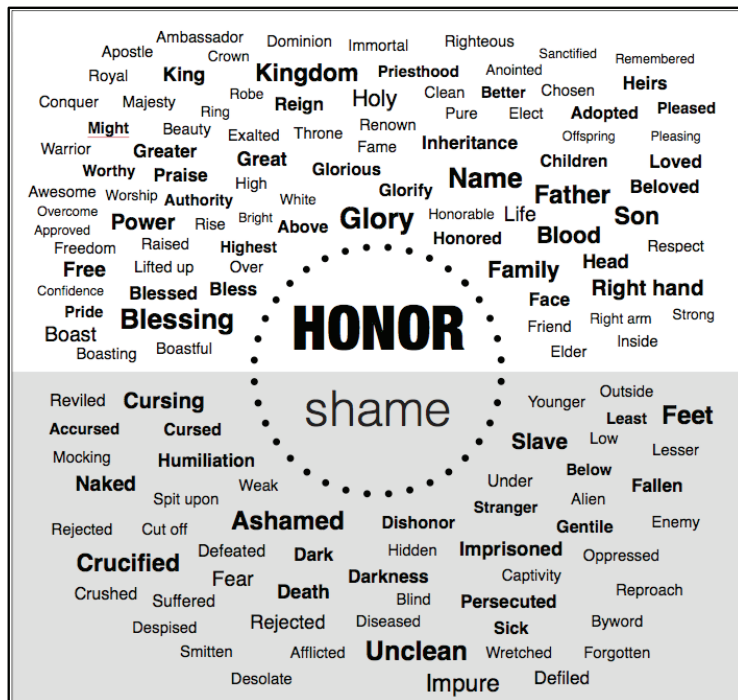
“Face” is a Chinese way of talking about honor and shame. Many Westerners have the impression that wanting “face” only has bad connotations, as if such a person is simply “proud.” No one denies that seeking face can express sinful pride. However, concern for “face” is not always sinful.

In China, “You don’t want face” ( 你不要脸 ), is an insult. Why? Someone who does not want “face” ( 脸 ) is immoral and does not care about the opinions of others. They have no “sense of shame” ( 不知廉耻 ).

As various scholars have observed, honor/shame (H/S) is “the pivotal cultural value” of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 lists a variety of words in Scripture related to H/S. With just a glance, we see that H/S lies beneath the surface of countless biblical passages, relating directly to reputation, respect for authority, group identity, and the gospel itself. And yet the biblical presence and significance of H/S is widely overlooked in the Western theology embraced around the world. This essay seeks to explain why this blind spot exists.

It is not sufficient simply to write off ignorance of H/S in the Bible to “cultural differences” in general. We need to understand the reasons for this oversight. And in removing this blind spot, we will better grasp both the Bible and how it addresses the needs of the people we serve. In what follows, we distinguish culture, theology, and biblical truth to give perspective on why this blind spot exists. We then identify fears that make people reluctant to treat H/S with the same seriousness as the parallel biblical framework of Innocence/Guilt. Finally, we consider the consequences of this H/S blind

Figure 1: Some of the Honor and Shame words in the Bible



spot: What common practices and strategies run counter to the Bible's teaching on honor-shame? What happens when we maintain a superficial view of H/S?

## CONFUSING THEOLOGY WITH BIBLICAL TRUTH

Figure 2 illustrates the interrelationship between biblical truth, theology, and cultural context.<sup>2</sup> Note first that biblical truth is larger and higher than any theology. No matter how refined one's theology may be, it can never be as comprehensive as the totality of biblical truth. Humans have limited knowledge, but God is omniscient; humanity is fallen and fallible, but the Bible is holy and infallible. It follows that every theology is smaller than the totality of biblical truth.

Now let's examine the six numbered areas.

Area 1 is where biblical truth overlaps with one's theology but not the cultural context. Here theology reflects biblical truth in opposing cultural practices like abortion or widow burning. Another example is the legal framework for the gospel recognized in Western theology—e.g., “The Four Spiritual Laws.” This has biblical support but fails to resonate with many non-Western cultures.

Area 2 is where biblical truth overlaps with the cultural context without being addressed in one's theology, such as Heibert's observation of Western theology's “excluded middle.”<sup>3</sup> This is where blind spots occur, as detailed below.

Area 3 is where one's theology and the cultural context overlap with biblical truth, as in a high view of the family.

Area 4 is where elements in a theology overlap with a cultural context but not with biblical truth. For example the “prosperity gospel” overlaps with America's culture of consumerism but not biblical truth.

Area 5 is where elements in a theology overlap with neither biblical truth nor a cultural context, as when a missionary unwittingly carries excessive Western individualism into a community-based, “collectivistic” culture. In a “collectivistic” context, groups largely shape personal identity and the community's needs are generally prioritized over individual concerns.

Area 6 is where cultural beliefs or values are inconsistent both with biblical truth and a particular theology.<sup>4</sup> Since every culture is fallen, any number of beliefs and values fall in this category. An example in American culture is a woman's alleged “right” to kill her unborn child.

What about the blind spot regarding honor and shame?

Take a closer look at Area 2—where blind spots occur. Why? When crossing cultures, we are naturally less familiar with the local customs and worldview. Since cultures have sinful elements we are naturally suspicious of unfamiliar values and ways of thinking. If we never read the Bible through alternate cultural lenses, we will assume that our own historical theology is comprehensive and flawless, without recognizing that it too has been contextualized within our own Western culture.

Just as all cultures contain sinful elements, so all retain facets of God's revelation. We should expect every culture to help us see biblical truth that our own culture minimizes or overlooks (as in Area 2). A non-Western lens can help us discover the rich H/S dynamics throughout the Bible. Sadly, this is almost totally ignored by Western theologians; the indexes of systematic theology books have multiple references to guilt but almost none for shame.<sup>5</sup> The same is true of familial piety, respect for ancestors, and collective identity. All of these not only were significant facets of the cultures in which the Bible was written; they also are present in many Majority World cultures today—both reached and unreached.

These observations should humble us, causing us to slow down and dig deeper when we read scripture for application in “foreign” contexts. If we don't, we may

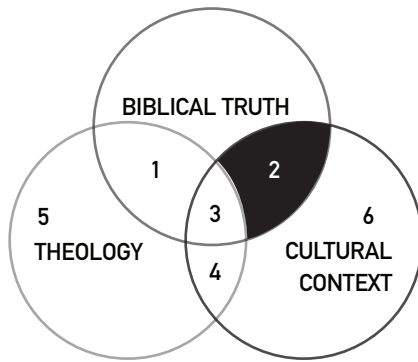


Figure 2: Intersections of Biblical Truth, Theology, and Cultural

inadvertently “assume the gospel” by limiting ourselves to its legal framework without consideration of other<sup>6</sup> biblically faithful and culturally meaningful

alternatives. Blind spots occur precisely where we imagine that our own understanding and presentation of the gospel are free of cultural influence. But every gospel presentation is shaped by the cultural values of the presenter and their perception of their intended audience’s cultural values.

Lesslie Newbigin famously states, “We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture.”<sup>7</sup> To be sure, the gospel transcends culture and its relevance is not confined to any one particular culture. However, this does not mean that we naturally understand and communicate that message apart from our own cultural vantage point, with its countless metaphors, assumptions, images, and analogies. No one person—and no one theology!—transcends all time and cultures.

## WHAT ARE WE AFRAID OF?

I sometimes find people afraid to delve into honor/shame, as if taking it seriously would undermine the guilt/innocence dimension of the gospel or the objectivity of moral right and wrong as established in the Bible. Such impressions are quite mistaken.<sup>8</sup> The acronym SCARE outlines five common fears people have about letting H/S substantially influence their theological and missiological thinking.

### Slow

H/S concerns one’s entire view of the world. Therefore, we cannot expect to “get” H/S quickly. It touches on every aspect of life. Furthermore H/S ministry is holistic, aiming at life transformation. If missionaries are too focused on numerical growth (i.e. conversions), they will lack the patience to invest in relationships and the process required for long-term maturity (i.e. discipleship).

### Complex

H/S is not a formula. Our worldview is more like a story than a system. H/S ministry cannot be reduced to four or five simple rules with guaranteed results. H/S feels complex because it integrates all of one’s life—head, heart and hands. However, ministry in the real world is complex (and not simply in so-called “honor-shame cultures”). Sometimes, we need to complicate our view of the problem if we are going to accurately solve it. For example, we wouldn’t tell cancer patients just to drink more water and get exercise. Similarly, if we want to minister in H/S cultures, we must wrestle with complexity.

### Ambiguous

An H/S worldview understands that daily life is full of gray; not everything is black and white. The Bible does not give us clear commands regarding how we ought to behave in every context and relationship. It mostly tells stories from which we abstract principles based on our culture.

Paul struggled with the ambiguity surrounding food offered to idols (cf. Rom 14; 1 Cor 8–10). It is intriguing and humbling that, according to Paul, people can “honor the Lord” even as they act out of mistaken theology (i.e. “the one who is weak in faith”; Rom 14:1–6). Our grasp of what is right and true might vary by degree in different settings. Such ambiguity may frighten those who want to draw distinct, universally applicable lines in the moral sand.

### Relativistic

Many people are conscious of sinful expressions of H/S (i.e. gang activity, honor killings, etc.). They fear that an H/S perspective opens the door to moral relativism. Yet Paul repeatedly explains sin in terms of “dishonoring” God and falling short of his glory (Rom 1:21–23; 2:23–24; 3:23). The gospel helps us more clearly apprehend God’s own standard for H/S. Several have detailed how H/S are critical themes in shaping a robust biblical theology.<sup>9</sup>

### Error

Ultimately, some fear that H/S thinking leads to theological error. After all, if the Church’s greatest minds have not emphasized H/S, who are we to pave new ground? To make matters worse, (Westernized) systematic theology consistently avoids any discussion of H/S. This is not without irony, as Protestantism itself is a testimony to the fact that church tradition often creates “theological inertia” in need of correction.

In fact, H/S is not “new”; it permeates Scripture and the

cultures in which it was inspired. The problem lies in the fact that we inevitably read the Bible with cultural filters, then dichotomize and absolutize theological categories. As a result, we end up with nearly as many blind spots as Bartimaeus.

H/S should not “SCARE” people; it is a natural aspect of all human cultures, and especially “collectivistic” societies. Collectivism is woven into the fabric of God’s mission in the world. Christ’s church represents God’s human family, consisting of all nations. God made humanity for the sake of His glory. It is perfectly legitimate to say that God has “face” (i.e. glory),<sup>10</sup> and that the gospel recounts how Christ “saves God’s face.”<sup>11</sup>

God’s people declare His glory (honor). Jesus himself explains faith in H/S terms: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44, ESV). By neglecting H/S in our theology and ministry, we make it more difficult for multitudes to believe in Christ.

## CONSEQUENCES OF OUR BLIND SPOT

Here are four consequences of our H/S blind spot, which I’ll address further in my forthcoming book, due out in January.<sup>12</sup>

First, anxieties about H/S may lead missionaries into practices that are counter-productive for long-term fruitfulness in H/S contexts. For example, people in traditional H/S cultures have a high respect for authority and tradition. We may confuse mere conformity to a teacher’s request with obedience resulting from a changed heart. Missionaries can also easily forget that many non-Westerners will pray a “prayer of salvation” simply to preserve friendships and save “face.”

Second, if we neglect to give attention to H/S, we are less likely to see worldview transformation. After all, H/S is a holistic concept, concerning every aspect of a person’s life. One’s identity transcends legal metaphors. The gospel transforms how we see God, ourselves, and others. It reshapes how we understand authority, reputation, and every human relationship.

Third, by overlooking the importance of H/S, missionaries unintentionally foster “theological syncretism.” We may be content with doctrines that our denomination, organization or church affirms but that may not reflect the emphasis of the original authors in their context. Yet, emphasis too is an integral part of the biblical authors’ meaning. Christians can easily “compromise the gospel by settling for truth.”<sup>13</sup> Rather than elevating specific

truths beyond their biblical emphasis, we must seek to understand the truths of God’s Word in balance with one another and not settle for pulling truths out of their context.

Without H/S, one’s theology can become abstract and less integrated. We can overemphasize systematic theology at the expense of biblical theology and exegesis. When this happens, Christian theology devolves into mere philosophy and we miss the grand narrative of scripture.

Finally, missionaries risk the danger of “judaizing” their listeners. That is, if missionaries do not remove this H/S blind spot from their own thinking, they will unconsciously present the gospel in a way that requires listeners to think like Westerners (e.g. as individualists who emphasize law) before they can understand the message and believe the gospel. Sadly, such new believers become functionally “Western” Christians even though they may culturally be African, Indian, Chinese, or Thai.

May God’s Word be a lamp unto our feet, exposing the blind spots that encumber gospel ministry. MF

- <sup>1</sup> *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*, by David A. deSilva (InterVarsity Press, 2000); *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, by Bruce J. Malina, Revised Edition (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, by Jerome H. Neyrey (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).
- <sup>2</sup> Figure 2 originally comes from *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*, by Jackson Wu (WCIU Press, 2013), 52–53. What follows is a modification of Werner Mischke’s summary of Wu’s graphic. See *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World*, by Werner Mischke (Mission One, 2015). Used with permission.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Flaw of the Excluded Middle* by Paul Heibert, in *Missiology: An International Review* (1982). [mis.sagepub.com/content/10/1/35](http://mis.sagepub.com/content/10/1/35)
- <sup>4</sup> Under “culture” we can also include subcultures like denominations.
- <sup>5</sup> *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology*, by Timothy C. Tennent (Zondervan, 2007), 92–93.
- <sup>6</sup> *Saving God’s Face*, 10–39.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* by Lesslie Newbigin (Eerdmans, 1989), 144.
- <sup>8</sup> *Saving God’s Face*, 148–92.
- <sup>9</sup> *Saving God’s Face*, 177–183, 193–292; *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*; and *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation*, by David A. deSilva (Liturgical Press, 1999).
- <sup>10</sup> *How God Seeks “Face.”* [JacksonWu.org/2014/09/02/how-does-god-see-face](http://JacksonWu.org/2014/09/02/how-does-god-see-face)
- <sup>11</sup> *Saving God’s Face*, ch 5.
- <sup>12</sup> *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization*, by Jackson Wu (William Carey Library Publishers, 2015).
- <sup>13</sup> “We Compromise the Gospel When We Settle for Truth: How ‘Right’ Interpretations Lead to ‘Wrong’ Contextualization,” by Jackson Wu in *Global Missiology* 2, no. 10 (2013), n.p. Online: [ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/issue/view/99](http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/issue/view/99)

HONOR AND  
SHAME IN  
LATIN AMERICAN  
CULTURE



W. PHILIP  
THORNTON, PH.D.

William Phil Thornton received his A.B Degree from Asbury University, the Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary, and the Ph.D. Degree in cultural anthropology from Southern Methodist University. His missionary service was in Colombia, S.A. where he worked in church planting and theological education by extension. From 1980 to 2008 Phil developed and taught the program in missions at Asbury University. Since retiring from his teaching position he has worked as a consultant with Global Impact Missions.

The role of honor and shame in Asia and Africa has been well established.<sup>1</sup> Yet a “blind spot” regarding the centrality of honor and shame in Latin American culture undermines our presentation of the gospel and our preparation of church leaders in Western-oriented, theological seminaries and Bible schools.

**ARE HONOR AND SHAME DYNAMICS CENTRAL TO LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE?**

Consider the following, in which the association with honor and shame is mine, although I rely heavily on Eugene Nida<sup>2</sup> and Marvin Mayers<sup>3</sup> observations as well as my own 30+ years as a missionary.

**IN LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE:**

1. The bullfight is not a sport, but an art form in which evil (as expressed by this tremendous power of nature—the bull) meets God’s supreme creation—man! The bull is strong and beautiful, both respected and feared. He represents the problems each spectator brings to the arena. In contrast El Matador, the bullfighter, is less than athletic in appearance. Often slight of build and dressed in pastel colors covered in gold and silver sequins, he represents the weaknesses and vulnerability of all those watching. Standing in the stead of the spectators, he cannot shrink from the fight. He does not have to be the most expert, but he must not show cowardice. To do so would bring shame on those he represents!
2. Society is structured in a strata-rank system,<sup>4</sup> with certain expectations for those with a higher position on the social ladder (e.g., keeping shoes shined, the car clean, and having sufficient maids). Failure to meet such expectations brings shame, as does associating with one who does not “behave his status.”
3. Appropriate dress plays an important role in gaining access to government officials and other persons of importance. “You dress up to the highest status possible for you.” To make a request of an official, I wore a dark suit, a white shirt, a tie, and had my shoes shined! To dress below my ascribed status would show a lack of respect (honor) to the official, resulting in my visit being rejected or delayed for hours.
4. When a father wants to name godparents for his child, he will carefully consider every angle before approaching the couple he has selected. If they agree, all is well and the father is honored by their acceptance. However if there is hesitancy or refusal he will incur shame.
5. Whenever the male’s machismo (manliness) is ignored or undermined the result is shame, and some form of retaliation may follow to restore lost honor.
6. Within the family unit, the father is the authority, and tasks which diminish his prestige are to be avoided. In a restaurant an upper class family sat at a nearby table, and the bow on the little girl’s dress came untied as she was bouncing around. She approached her father, but he immediately sent her to her mother—not because he was incapable of tying the bow but because doing so would have meant a loss of prestige before those of us in the restaurant.
7. The wife is likewise affected by the shame/honor continuum. Her husband can be involved in numerous extramarital sexual affairs and she is expected to remain quiet. To confront him would bring shame to both him and her. By her actions (i.e., fulfilling the expectations associated with her role) she also plays a key role in maintaining the honor

(or shame) of her family and extended family, maintaining her reputation and the reputation of those associated with her. As such her reputation is a major concern for her husband, and is protected with all diligence. Woe to anyone who soils her reputation!

8. A death in the family also carries potential for family honor or shame, and preparations are elaborate. The type of food served, the processions, the rituals, the dress—all are scripted to honor the memory of the love one who has died. To do less brings shame upon the family.

9. Exposure of weakness or failure is avoided as shameful, and society is designed to support the person who is trying to avoid the appearance of weakness and cover for the one who is experiencing shame. Idioms reflects this in phrases like *se perdió* (it lost itself) or *se cayó* (it dropped itself)—responses that blame the object rather than the person who lost it or dropped it. If uninterrupted and smooth reading is an expectation of one's social position, a person with poor oral reading skills will not read in public. To do so would bring him shame. A person reprimanded (shamed) in public may be driven to seek retribution, and a family in financial straits may seek money from a relative or employer to maintain the perception of financial stability.

10. One's state in life is a matter of shame or honor. In stark contrast to the North American sentiment "to be born poor is no disgrace," the very poor in Latin America believe "nacer pobre es un delito" (to be born poor is a crime). In one village we visited an elderly Quechua woman cried over her "shame" at not being able to receive us in a manner worthy of our perceived status. She was born poor, and was ashamed of her poverty in the presence of her visitors.

11. The church too is influenced by honor/shame dynamics. Popular Roman Catholicism posits that the spirit can maintain its honor even when the flesh is involved in sin. So the thief can use stolen money for a candle to burn before his patron saint, and the prostitute can place money she just earned before a statue of the Virgin Mary.


12. Historically the power of honor and shame is seen in the young *mestizo* born of the Spanish Conquistador and an Indian wife. The boy idealizes the father who brought him status and honor, even though he was never present, yet because of her lowly status he is ashamed of the Indian mother who loved him and provided for all his needs.

From my own experience:

- A man I had gotten to know came to my office and explained that his wife was sick and he needed to purchase medicine but he didn't have the money. He asked to "borrow" one hundred pesos. I gave him the money, fully aware it would never be paid back. To have asked for a gift would have brought him shame, so he worded the request to maintain his dignity and honor even though both of us understood what he really meant.

- A young Indian girl became our house helper and came to know Christ. In the shuffle of coming forward to receive communion, she was left sitting at one end of a pew with three "churchgoers" at the other end. These three perceived her status as lower than theirs, and just sitting on the same row as someone with a lower status caused the three to feel such shame that they felt compelled to move to another row that was already full, leaving her alone.
- All day I struggled to communicate to the young Quechua seminary students how rich their culture is in stories and customs that provide "bridges" for sharing the gospel. Finally, one young man explained in Spanish that his parents had sternly warned him to never speak the Quechua language or discuss Quechua ways in the presence of others. To do so would bring shame not only upon the young man but also to his family. I saw his Quechua cultural heritage as helpful, but through his honor/shame lens he saw it as hurtful and to be avoided.

Understanding honor and shame in Latin culture is significant for both evangelism and theological education. I close with these questions for you to ponder:

- If honor and shame play a more significant role than previously realized, how should the message of the Gospel be reframed to speak more directly to the values of Latin culture?
- Might the gospel be better understood and embraced in Latin America as Christ restoring our honor and removing the shame of those who have "sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"?
- How should the centrality of honor and shame in both Latin and Muslim cultures influence how we train Latin American missionaries to Muslim lands?
- How should awareness of honor and shame influence our training of Latin American pastors? 

*Adapted from Beyond Literate Western Contexts: Honor & Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference, Samuel E. Chiang & Grant Lovejoy editors (2015 in cooperation with Capstone Enterprises)*

<sup>1</sup> See <http://WernerMischke.org/resources>

<sup>2</sup> *Understanding Latin America: With Special Reference to religious Values and Movements* by Eugene A. Nida (William Carey Library Publishers: 1974)

<sup>3</sup> *A Look at Latin American Lifestyles*, 2nd edition (International Museum of Cultures Publication) by Marvin K. Mayers (Summer Institute of Linguistics: 1982)

<sup>4</sup> As opposed to a caste or class system. In strata-rank systems, every person perceives everyone else in the system as either above or below himself.

*Adapted from Beyond Literate Western Contexts: Honor*



# GOOD NEWS! GOD HONORS US BY ENTERING OUR STORY

## LOEWEN

Loewen has studied, lived and worked in South Asia and Central Asia since the early 1980s. A specialist in Persian culture and society, he has earned an MA in Persian and a PhD in Middle Eastern Civilizations. Loewen runs leadership training programs in many different settings both for the church as well as professional institutions.

## ENTERING YOUR STORY

I brought some candy with me for the national staff of an NGO in Central Asia. They thanked me of course, to which I replied, “It was nothing.” And really it was a very little gift, but one elderly man made the point, “But you thought about us.” When someone thinks about us, we feel encouraged; we feel honored. Afghans say this with the idiom “So and so entered my story” (*qissa* /هـ ص ق/). This means “the other person honored me by paying attention to my situation.”<sup>1</sup> And this reflects our human condition. We would die inside if absolutely no one cared for us or thought about us. Sadly, many people have exactly this experience.

“Entering someone’s story” is an apt description of really caring for another person, as “story” refers to one’s life experiences—the sad and the happy, the ups and downs.

Most people think only about their own and their family’s “story,” which they seek to make interesting and satisfying. However, when someone enters our story they show us honor, and when they ignore us we feel dishonored and perhaps insulted.

When we look at the mega-story of the Bible, we see an amazing full-orbed story of good news.

## 1. THE GOSPEL IS THE STORY OF HOW GOD HONORS HUMANS BY ENTERING OUR STORY

Throughout the Bible, we see God engaging humans: God entered the garden to talk with Adam and Eve, even after they had shamed God by disobeying Him and trying to gain more honor for themselves. God entered Abraham’s life, honoring him with great promises and a mandate to bless the entire world and care for all peoples of this world. God entered Moses’ story to save the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. God entered the community of Israel by directing them to build a tabernacle where He could dwell, with the promise “My name will be there.”

Ultimately God entered our world as “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” In the Messiah, God supremely honored humankind by entering our story in the most vulnerable way. God’s story is the story of the Messiah entering our stories and honoring us.

*For God so honors the people of the world and gives them dignity that He generously gave everything of His own being so that anyone who truly treasures and completely follows the Messiah as their true patron and master will never be ashamed or dishonored. They will indeed experience genuine honor and dignity for the rest of their lives and beyond. (paraphrase of John 3:16)*

Jesus walked with human beings, healed them and loved them. “When He saw the multitudes, he had compassion on them.” That is, He entered their story. The story Jesus told of two lost sons in Luke 15 classically reflects how the father honored his own shamed sons by entering their lives. Finally, Jesus voluntarily offered His own life to restore dignity to every human being.

## 2. AS FOLLOWERS OF THE MESSIAH WE ALSO ENTER GOD'S STORY

The gospel story is much more than God honoring us by becoming involved in our lives.

The prophets of old called people to love and honor God with all their hearts, and to train their children to follow God as well.

When Jesus walked among the people, He called them to repent and embrace God's kingdom. Since the Messiah has favored us by entering our story, every beneficiary of this news rightly responds by embracing the Messiah as their supreme master and patron—becoming totally loyal and “keeping the faith” in the sense of remaining true to their Master. Such believers have full confidence (trust) in their Master to protect and support them in all of life, and serve this Master and return favors for His amazing provision of salvation. Such believers boast of their Master, spreading His story to the world.

As we believe in this way, we enter God's story.

## 3. AS FOLLOWERS OF THE MESSIAH WE ALSO ENTER THE STORY OF OTHERS

As we enter God's story, we become part of His story. And His gospel story continues and spreads as believers enter the lives of others. We cannot be faithful to our Master and ignore other people. It is impossible to honor God and not care for others (1 John 3:14). Anyone who experiences God's honor in their lives and enters God's salvation story will naturally enter the lives of people around them.

We must do for others what God has done for us. Miroslav Volf puts it this way: “Inscribed on the very heart of God's grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us. Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in—even our enemies.” As God honors us, so we must honor others. This is a transformed and new way to gain honor—by honoring others! When a believer does not honor people, he dishonors and shames God. We read,

*Since God first honored us, we honor one another. If a person says, “Glory to God!,” but pays no attention to his brother, such a person shames God and lies to Him because if this person pays no attention to his brother whom he sees, how can he give honor to God whom he does not see? God has given this mandate to us: “Whoever honors God, must enter his brother's life.” (paraphrase of 1 John 4:19-21)*

This is the law of Christ. When we join God's story, the

Messiah's law reorders our way of life. It turns on its head the old culture of endless honor competitions, envy, boasting and struggling to make a name for oneself and one's social group or tribe. In this new system we disdain selfish ambition and in gracious humility esteem others as genuinely significant. In this story, we become interested in others and care for them, even our enemies. E. Stanley Jones writes:

In the highest reaches of Christian caring, the caring reaches even to enemies and to those who mistreat you.... The future of the world is in the hands of those who care, not on a limited scale—myself, my family, my class, my race, my party—but in the hands of those who care with unlimited caring. If the Christian movement becomes the society of universal caring, it wins. If it becomes the society of limited caring, it loses. No matter how good its doctrines, beautiful its liturgy, strong its teaching, and loud its claims, if it isn't the society of universal caring, it ultimately loses.

Paul commends his colleague Timothy to the group of believers in Philippi, “Timothy truly cares about how you are doing. All the others are looking out for their own interests. They are not looking out for the interests of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 2:20b–21). Timothy is part of the Jesus story when he is genuinely interested in others. He entered the Messiah's story by entering the story of other people.

God's story goes full circle, a dance of receiving honor from God and returning that honor by esteeming others. This story transforms the worlds of twisted honors where we resort to dishonorable means and vices in order to accumulate self-absorbed honor and build up our own stunted stories.

This God-Spirited, “other-oriented” story catapults me to rejoice in the growth and joys of others, as a Persian poem says:

با هر دلی که شاد شود شاد میشوم، آباد هر کی گشت من آباد میشوم

I rejoice with the one who is full of joy, I flourish with those who flourish.

As a practical conclusion, think of three ways you can enter the lives of other people. 

<sup>1</sup> Afghans more often use this term negatively, as in “He isn't in my story.” By this they mean “he doesn't care about me” or “he never thinks about me.”

<sup>2</sup> *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* by Miroslav Volf (Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *A Song of Ascents: A Spiritual Autobiography* by E. Stanley Jones (Abingdon Press, 1968), pp 292–294.

## JAYSON GEORGES

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**W**hile shame may be primary in some societies, it is present to some degree in all cultures. And honor and shame are dominant influences in many pockets of American society in which public praise and scorn regulate behavior.

In such groups, a person's status is determined by meeting the group's unwritten expectations. Here are several American subcultures that employ the carrot of honor and stick of shame:

**TEENAGERS:** I like to joke that “the most honor/shame-dominated people group in the world is a group of junior high students.” Remember the pressure to act certain ways or wear certain clothes to be part of the “in crowd”? Teenage communities use the shame of ostracism and the honor of “being cool” to enforce conformity.

**THE MILITARY:** Google “honor” and you get mostly military images. Those who serve experience a strong code of honor. Since no financial compensation would propel someone to sacrifice their life for others, acts of bravery are rewarded with public honor.

**IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES:** Changes in U.S. immigration policy in 1965 opened our borders to an influx of people from more shame-based cultures. First generation immigrants often form close-knit neighborhoods (i.e., Chinatown, Little Saigon, etc.) in which their traditional culture is preserved, and they use honor and shame to maintain their cultural distinctives.


**RURAL COMMUNITIES:** In small town America—where your butcher is your neighbor and your kid's basketball coach—gossip spreads quickly. Reputation is important, because there are few places to hide your shame in a town of 500.

**GANGS:** Honor is everything in street life. The “code of the street”<sup>1</sup> revolves around “respect,” being treated with the honor one deserves and not being shamed. Projecting a dominant reputation trumps personal responsibility or future-building. Within gang culture, even disobeying the gang's “rules” can be a badge of honor.

**SPORTS TEAMS:** Athletic prowess is rewarded with honor, especially for those who sacrifice their physical body for their team. Those who excel at the professional level are admitted into the “Hall of Fame.” The sports team vocabulary for honor is “Be a man!,” “Don't be a sissy,” or “He is a beast!” “Man,” “sissy,” and “beast” are left undefined, but we all recognize them as attributions of honor or shame.

**CHURCH:** Are there unwritten rules of how people “should” behave in church, enforced by gossip or worse? Considering the label, it is ironic that legalism typically uses “shame” more than “guilt” to shape behaviors. Some elements of Christian shame are of course appropriate — the gospel reveals our inadequacy and unworthiness before our awesome God. But Christians also frequently work hard at hiding a false shame at “not being good enough.”

Honor and shame are inherently communal, typically coming into play in any group where cohesion is essential for success and survival. In such contexts groups naturally resort to shaming those unwilling to do what is best for the group. By noticing honor and shame in these contexts with which we are all familiar, we will hopefully be better equipped to see it in the Bible and other cultures as well.

Could greater awareness of the roles shame and honor play in our own spheres of influence empower us to share the gospel in ways that communicate more deeply with the lost around us? 

<sup>1</sup> See *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* by Elijah Anderson (W. W. Norton & Company, 2000)



+ FEATURE

# THE GOSPEL OF PORITY FOR UNREACHED PEOPLES

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## WERNER MISCHKE

Werner Mischke has been serving with Mission ONE since 1992, and is currently Executive Vice President and Director of Training Ministries. A 2009 ministry trip to Lebanon inspired Werner to research honor-shame dynamics in the Bible. This led to extensive reading, researching, training, and to collaboration in developing resources about honor/shame for the missions community.  
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*Adapted from The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World by Werner Mischke (MissionONE: 2015) Purity is one of nine honor/shame dynamics explored in this book.*

**D**oes the Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim have to learn to think like a Westerner about guilt before he or she can appreciate the good news that Jesus' blood offers a better answer to their problem of sin and shame?

## PURITY PRACTICES AND RITUAL CLEANSING IN MAJOR RELIGIONS

The vast majority of unreached and unengaged peoples embrace Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam. And despite their many significant differences, these religions share at least one thing in common—religious purification rituals.

**Buddhism:** “Purity (suddha) [aims] to purify the personality ... so that all moral and character defilements and defects ... such as anger, ignorance and lust are wiped away and Nirvana can be obtained.”<sup>1</sup>

**Hinduism:** “Religious acts presuppose some degree of impurity or defilement for the practitioner, which must be overcome ... before or during ritual procedures. Purification, usually with water, is thus a typical feature of most religious action.”<sup>2</sup>

**Islam:** The Quran says, “For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean” (2:222). “Before offering prayers, it is necessary to perform [ritual purification]. ... If the body or clothes show traces of blood, pus, urine, feces, semen or alcohol, then [purification] becomes essential. ... The Quran says: “None shall touch it but those who are clean (56:79).”<sup>3</sup>

## THE HEBREWS ALSO HAD PURITY RITUALS—PART OF THE “CYCLE OF SANCTIFICATION”

For the Hebrews, everything in life was perceived in relation to God's holiness. This led to the purity concepts of *clean* and *unclean*.

On the basis of Levitical law, everything in life was either holy or common for the Hebrews. Those things determined common were subdivided into categories of clean and unclean. ... Clean things might become holy through sanctification or unclean through pollution. Holy things could be profaned and become common or even unclean. Unclean things could be cleansed and then consecrated or sanctified to be made holy.<sup>4</sup>

# PURITY-BASED GOSPEL PRESENTATION FOR MUSLIMS, HINDUS AND BUDDHISTS

*Adapted from “The Gospel for Shame Cultures”, a 1994 EMQ article*

Bruce later posted a revision of that article here: [http://oprev.org/wp-content/back\\_issues/1stQtr02.htm#feature3](http://oprev.org/wp-content/back_issues/1stQtr02.htm#feature3)

## / BRUCE “THOMAS” SIDEBOTHAM

Imagine yourself in a Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist culture obsessed with dietary limitations, ritual cleansing from defilement, and seeking honor. Now consider a gospel presentation that starts with what you already “know,” rather than asking you to think like a Westerner about personal guilt:

All flesh is defiled, and from before birth needs to be cleansed. But ceremonial rituals aren't enough because dirt can't make itself clean and darkness can't make itself light.

Yet God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all! And just as a candle drives darkness from a room by entering it, He alone has the power to drive out our defilement and give us true enlightenment.

God saw that our own best efforts to cleanse ourselves are like dressing in “filthy rags.” So He provided our only hope. God Himself embraced and destroyed defilement by entering His own creation in the person of Jesus Christ, the only man to ever live undefiled. The Bible describes Jesus as “the true light that enlightens every man.”

Not only did Jesus destroy defilement through his holy life, but He also demonstrated that He is God by driving disease out through his touch and even his spit! No mere prophet could touch a leper without being contaminated, and a prophet's spit is just as foul as anyone else's. So Jesus' miracles—healing blind eyes with spit and the leper with His touch—prove that Jesus alone is God, come to deliver us from our defilement and our diseases.

And not only did Jesus destroy defilement and disease by embracing them, He also embraced the greatest enemy—death itself—and then destroyed it by rising again to prove that He truly is God.

Thus our only hope for true cleansing and enlightenment lies in inviting Jesus Himself to cleanse our defilement, and to send His Spirit to enlighten us, by living in and through us. All your life you have sought cleansing or enlightenment that you cannot attain on your own. Are you ready to abandon that burden and embrace being a new creation in Jesus Christ?

## MOVING TOWARD HONOR OR SHAME?

Jewish behaviors in the cycle of sanctification were of two types, as shown in Figure 1 below<sup>5</sup>—moving toward honor and the holy, or moving toward shame and the unclean.

### 1) Actions moving a person toward holiness, toward God (and honor):

- **Cleanse:** People who were unclean needed to go through ritual cleansing in order to become clean. There were

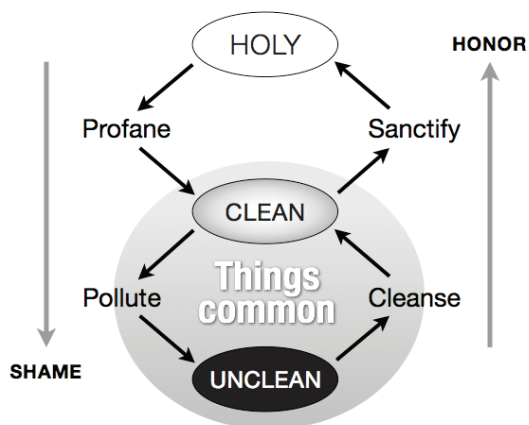


Figure 1

rules for many kinds of uncleanness: bodily and sexual discharges including menstruation (Lev 15; 18:19), touching someone with disease (Lev 13), touching a corpse (Lev 22:4–6), eating unclean food (Lev 11), and various diseases of which the worst was leprosy (Lev 13).

- **Sanctify:** If a person was clean, he or she could sanctify him or herself to become holy (or separate), in order to enter the presence of God. This was necessary for the levitical priests in order for them to serve in the temple.

### 2) Actions moving a person away from holiness, away from God (toward uncleanness/shame):

- **Profane:** A priest who was holy could become profaned by association with anything common (Lev 21). In turn, he would have to be sanctified—a ritual done in cooperation with God—in order to regain his “holiness” and the ability to enter the presence of a holy God.

- **Pollute:** A person who was clean could be polluted and thereby become unclean by the same variety of things listed above in regard to cleansing: sexual activity, menstruation, touching a corpse, eating unclean food, or having a disease. The unclean person would then have to follow the appropriate laws of cleansing to once again regain his or her position of cleanness.<sup>6</sup>

## JESUS CLEANSSES THE LEPER —A MAN PROFOUNDLY UNCLEAN

Let’s consider a passage of Scripture linking Old and New Testament concepts about purity.

*While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”*  
(Luke 5:12–14, cf Mark 1:40–44)

How can we grasp the depth of uncleanness and shame of the “man full of leprosy”? Especially noteworthy is this passage from Leviticus:

*The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.*  
(Lev 13:45–46)

We make note of three things:

- The leprous person was to make himself unattractive: He “shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose.” Leprous persons were not allowed to dress up in attempt to cover up their disease.
- The leprous person was to announce his uncleanness: “he shall ... cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’” He was to proclaim his uncleanness and shame publicly.
- The leprous person was to be isolated and segregated: “He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.” The health of the larger community could not be compromised by the disease of the individual. The leper had to be quarantined.

Since the Hebrews had their identity rooted in their community, the shame and degree of exclusion for the man full of leprosy was extreme. Of course, there were good reasons for isolating people with contagious disease. God was providing boundaries for their survival.

## UNCLEANNES AND SHAME

What may we observe about Jesus and the “man full of leprosy”? First, the man full of leprosy had little hope of ever again becoming clean. He was not able to regain

his honor or “place” in the community. His was a life of isolation, embodying shame.

Second, Jesus “stretched out his hand and touched” the man full of leprosy and said, “Be clean.” Two miracles happened. One, the leper was cleansed. Two, apparently Jesus did not himself become unclean! His personal purity was untainted. This was unthinkable to the Jewish mind.

Third, we observe that Jesus was concerned for the man’s reintegration into his own community: “Go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” Jesus wanted the leper to have his honor restored among his own family and friends following the process defined in Leviticus 14. Here are two main points concerning purity codes and honor/shame:

- In the social world of God’s people, the Jews, in both Old and New Testaments, the laws and practices about purity and uncleanness corresponded to honor and shame.
- When Jesus touched and healed him, he violated the traditional purity codes by transcending them. Jesus introduced a new set of variables for determining what is common or holy, unclean or clean, outside the group or inside the group, shameful or honorable.

### PURITY LANGUAGE IN THE GOSPEL MESSAGE


The apostle John used purity language to describe how Christians can enter into fellowship with one another and with God. It is the blood of Jesus which cleanses God’s people from their sins:

*“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7, 9).*

Some of the New Testament’s most extensive material connecting purity with the saving work of Christ and the life of believers is contained in Hebrews. For example:

- Reflecting the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, the atonement of Christ is summarized as “*making purification for sins*” (1:3).
- The sacrifice of “*the blood of goats and bulls*” is contrasted with the far superior sacrifice of Jesus Christ as high priest—who offered his own blood to “*purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*” (9:13–14).
- Believers are admonished to “*draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*” (10:22).

### A GOSPEL OF PURITY FOR MAJORITY WORLD PEOPLES

The cultural dynamics of purity and honor/shame are held in common by the Bible’s cultures and many Majority World peoples, and this represents a significant opportunity for contextualizing the gospel. The man who was full of leprosy pleaded, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” Using similar language, believers can present to people in the Majority World the good news that Jesus Christ came to cleanse them of their sin and shame. When introducing the gospel, believers can ask, for example, “Can I tell you a story about God coming to earth to cover your sin and shame, and to make you clean forever?” 

*This material will also be adapted from Beyond Literate Western Contexts: Honor & Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference, Samuel E. Chiang & Grant Lovejoy editors (2015 in cooperation with Capstone Enterprises)*

1 *Purity in Buddhism*, <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purity\_in\_Buddhism>.

2 *Ritual Purification*, <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>.

3 *Ritual Purity in Islam*, <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual\_purity\_in\_Islam>.

4 *A Survey of the Old Testament* by A. E. Hill and J. F. Walton (Zondervan: 2009), pp. 133–134.

5 Diagram adapted from *A Survey of the Old Testament*, “Figure 6.1. The Cycle of Sanctification,” p. 133.

6 Ezekiel 16:1–62. This chapter describes “The Lord’s Faithless Bride” and vividly illustrates how great uncleanness corresponded to deep shame in ancient Jewish culture.



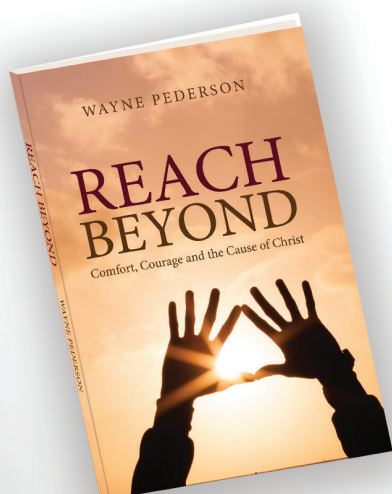


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THE CHRISTIANS  
ON THIS PAGE?**



**THERE PROBABLY AREN'T ANY.**

**ARE YOU OK WITH THAT?**



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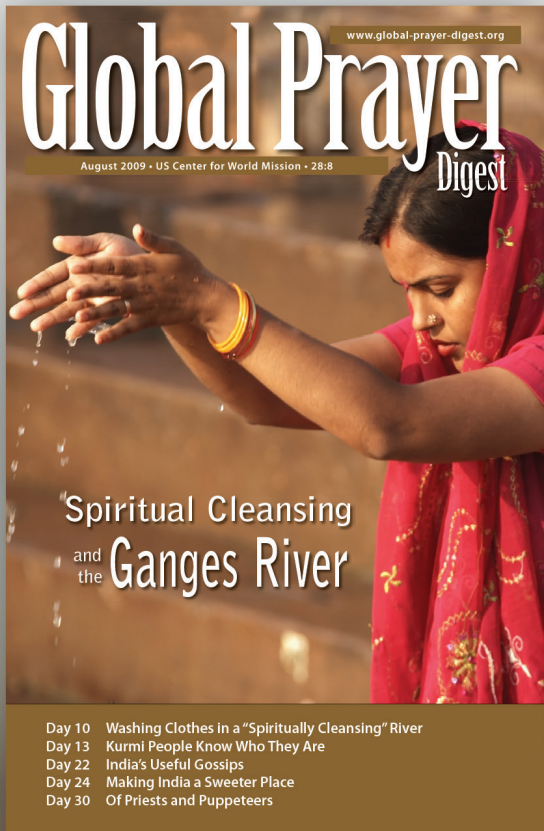
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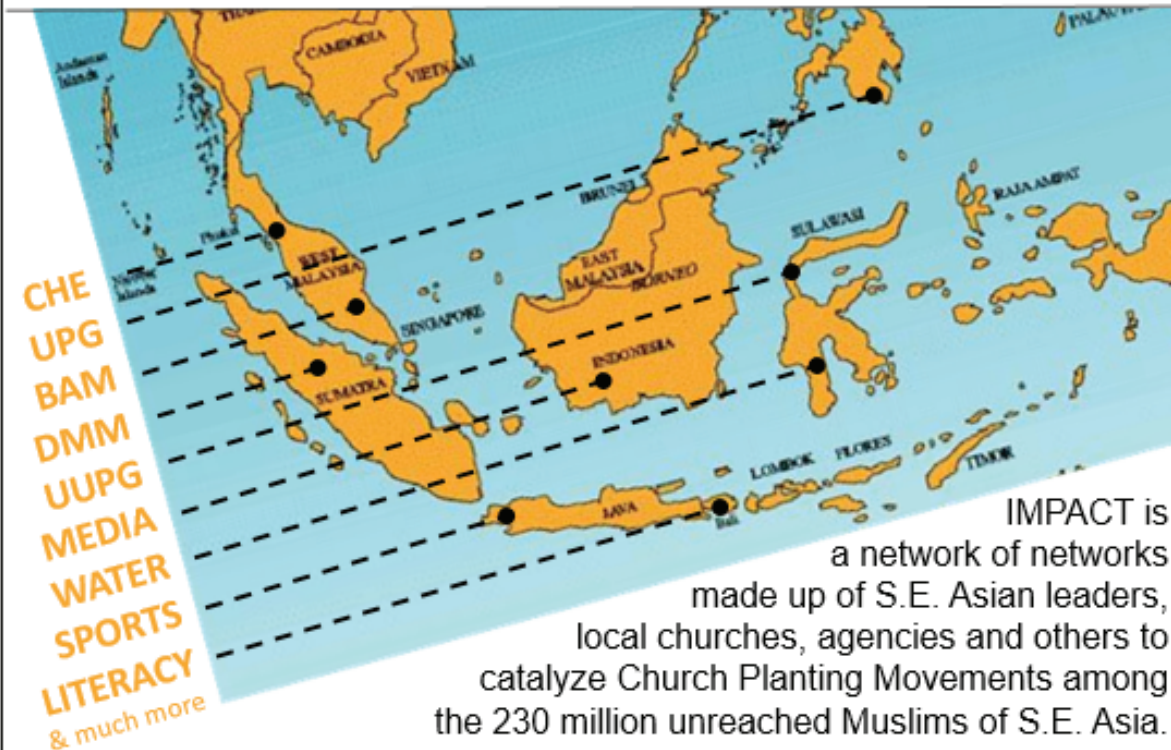
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— TO —  
LOVE  
— THE —  
GLORY  
— OF —  
GOD

At the dramatic crescendo of John's gospel, Jesus makes a final appeal, that those who could perceive the light of the world would "believe in the light" to become "sons of light" (John 12:36). Even though most chose not to believe in Him (12:37), John adds the detail that "many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him" (12:42).

#### **FAITH WITHOUT FOLLOWING: FEAR OF SHAME**

This is a familiar outcome to anyone involved in frontier

missions. Why do we so often see more believers than followers? John offers a penetrating insight as to why: The leaders were fearful of being ousted from their society. They remained crypto-believers "for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue" (12:42). John gets to the heart of the matter: The fear was based on a love: "for they loved the glory (Greek: *doxa*) of men rather than the glory (*doxa*) of God" (12:43). We can say three things about the glory that comes from God.

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### STEVE HAWTHORNE

Steve Hawthorne co-edited the book and course *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* with Ralph Winter. In the 1980s he initiated and led a series of teams doing field research to identify unreached people groups in world-class cities. He holds a PhD from Fuller Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies. He now works with WayMakers, a mission and prayer mobilization group. He speaks with living passion for the greater glory of Christ among the nations. Steve says of his ministry, "I like to commit arson of the heart."

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## 1. TWO KINDS OF GLORY

Translators often choose roundabout expressions such as “approval,” or “praise” to translate the well-known word *doxa*, or “glory,” in verse 43. John plainly intends to contrast two different categories of glory. There is a kind of glory, praise or honor that people can seek to gain from other people. There is another kind of glory, praise or honor that people can hope to receive from God Himself. Perhaps translators have been reluctant to suggest that glory would come to any entity but God Himself. But even a quick scan of scripture shows that God does indeed bestow glory upon people.

The Psalmist answers his own question about humankind — “What is man?” — by recognizing that humanity is crowned with “with glory and majesty” (Psalm 8:4-5). Paul says that humanity made a dreadful exchange, trading “the glory of the incorruptible God” for a much lesser glory, that of “an image in the form of corruptible man” (Romans 1:23). The tower of Babel was much more than a project to construct a tower and a city. They were actually seeking to fabricate their own self-bestowed glory: “Let us make for ourselves a name” (Genesis 11:4). This ambition was directly answered by a God-granted glory that is intrinsic to the Abrahamic covenant. We often quote lines from Genesis 12 that promise that Abraham and family would be blessed to be a blessing. But those lines that

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promise blessing are entwined with statements of God’s promise to honor Abraham by giving him a great name. This notion of “name” as renown and respect is the same terminology that had been used at Babel. The difference

was that the honor bestowed upon Abraham was to be God-given:

***“And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2).***

There are many more biblical references that explicitly contrast these two ways that humanity seeks glory. The

twisted, self-bestowed honor we can call “broken glory.” Every society in history has been rife with schemes and routines of gaining status and fame in the eyes of other people. Every system of broken glory is somehow perverse and sometimes monstrously distorted so that people find themselves struggling in the ugly absurdity that their “glory is in their shame” (Philippians 3:19).

The other way of honor is glory that is granted by God Himself. We can call it “better glory.” Jesus contrasts this glory by challenging people to abandon the habit of receiving “glory from one another” and instead to “seek the glory that is from the one and only God” (John 5:44).

## 2. RELATIONAL GLORY

John’s account describes our attachment to either way of glory — the broken glory exchanged among humans, or the better glory coming from God — as relational realities of love. We either devote ourselves to one way of glory or the other. We can see innumerable cultural patterns and social structures by which people negotiate an exchange of broken glory as essentially eroded, fragmented, distanced relationships.

The glory that comes from God is also a relational reality, but one that is full and abounds in joy. The title of my friend Fawn Parrish’s book conveys a book-load of truth in itself: *Honor: What Love Looks Like*. Those that God loves, He also lifts, honoring them even by His condescension to receive them. How outrageous is God’s love!

## 3. TRANSCENDENT INTRA-TRINITARIAN GLORY

We are accustomed to speaking of glory that should come to God from His creation. We can also see glory coming from God to those that He loves. But the exchange of honor, glory and love is not just to and from God; it takes place everlastingly in and amidst the persons of the Trinity. Jesus pointedly speaks of glory that He enjoyed “with” the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5). Jesus equates that eternal glory with the love that ever flows amidst Father, Son and Spirit. He prays that His people will behold this love that bestows glory: “so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (17:24).

This astounding truth, that honor is exuberantly exchanged amidst the Spirit, Son and Father from eternity to eternity, means that the relational realities of honor should not be reduced in our thinking as facets of particular cultures with peculiar face-saving customs. Love that honors is a reality that predates the foundation of the

world. Every society's system of honor-shame is derived, usually in a distorted way, from the glory that freely and everlastingly abounds in the Trinity.

## RECOGNIZING HONOR IN FRONTIER MISSION

What is the significance of this God-wrought better glory for mission endeavor? At least three things come to mind:

### 1. RECOGNIZE DYNAMICS OF HONOR AND SHAME

Westerners have long recognized that many societies function with well-developed systems of avoiding shame while gaining and preserving honor. In business endeavors and 20th century military operations it had become commonplace for leaders to be briefed on the honor-shame aspects of particular societies.

In mission practice, awareness of honor-shame dynamics is recognized as helpful to understanding how to be received and understood in a cross-cultural setting. At the same time, honor-shame can be regarded as nothing more than a set of helpful hints about how to get a hearing and not offend locals.

Yet it is arrogant to consider honor-shame societies as backwards or primitive. Every society in history incorporates honor-shame dynamics. And every such system is, to some extent, broken. Christ redeems and transforms cultures, and with this transformation, people are freed from patterns of broken glory so that they can love God and delight in the better glory God gives to those who love Him.

### 2. PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF GOD

The gospel announces that God has exalted a human from death and hell to His right hand, and has given Him authority and a name above all others. This exalted Man now summons men, women and children from every language and lineage, not simply to escape hell, but to be joined with Him so that they may share in His glory — both individually and corporately. Paul understood his work as fully declaring the word of God (Colossians 1:25) so that the “riches of the glory” of the gospel would be known among the peoples, which is Christ as Lord amidst the peoples, the hope of their glory (1:27). See accompanying figure.

The fullest announcement of the gospel will convey the hope of the better honor from and with Christ. Paul


prays for the Gentiles, that “the Father of glory” would be revealed, so that “the eyes of [their] heart [would] be enlightened” to see “the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory” that he lavishes upon those He loves (Ephesians 1:15-18). If we fail to convey the hope of the better honor found in following Jesus, we may find that many we persuade to believe in Christ — like some Jews of Jesus’ day — refuse to follow Christ openly for fear of being disgraced or excluded from their societies. If we can introduce people to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as fulfilling the hopes of their people for a better honor, we may find people moved to not only put their private faith in Jesus, but to publicly fix their hope upon Him as well.

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### 3. RECEIVE AND REJOICE

As Christ draws followers to Himself from every people, their obedience to Him will be expressed in a variety of culturally appropriate ways. Romans 15:1-13 suggests that we are to anticipate different cultural practices. The strong are urged to bear with those who are weak, joining Christ in bearing the reproach, or shame, of being associated with different peoples following the same Lord. God encourages us through the scriptures to live in the hope of being His people who glorify Him on earth. And thus the crucial directive: We are to “receive one another, just as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). 



# THE GOOD NEWS FOR MUSLIMS IN HONOR -BASED CULTURES

BY JEFF HAYES

## JEFF HAYES

Jeff Hayes has been involved with Muslims since 1976. He served in the Middle East for 22 years and is fluent in Arabic. He has developed many tools to share with Muslims, and currently spends a lot of his efforts in equipping laborers to be more effective witnesses. He also works in translation between Arabic and English. He focuses on finding commonalities with Muslims that are useful as stepping stones from what they believe to who Jesus is. Contact: [shamehonorogospel@gmail.com](mailto:shamehonorogospel@gmail.com)

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## THE GOSPEL: MORE THAN WE THOUGHT

We often present the Gospel simply as forgiveness for our sins, but Jesus died not just to take away our sins, but to take away our shame, our fear, our estrangement, our uncleanness, our blindness, etc.

### The Good News includes:

- Honor for the shamed
- Reconciliation for the estranged
- Cleansing for the filthy
- Chosen-ness for the nobodies
- Guidance for the lost
- Provision for the poor
- Forgiveness for the guilty
- Truth for the seeker
- Satisfaction for the hungry
- Closeness for the far-off
- Power to the helpless
- Resurrection for the dead
- Freedom for the imprisoned
- Completion for the failure
- Adoption for the illegitimate
- Knowledge for the ignorant
- Enlightenment for those in darkness
- Strength/encouragement for those stumbling
- Exoneration for the accused
- Blessing for the accursed
- Renewal for the weary
- Redemption for the guilty
- Acceptance for the rejected etc.
- Sight for the blind
- His Presence for the lonely
- Beauty for the ugly
- Reunion for the separated
- Release for the indebted

## HONOR-SHAME VS GUILT-INNOCENCE

Guilt and innocence are individualistic concepts reflecting a person's state with reference to a judge or law, while honor and shame are community concepts relating to a person's relationship with a community.

Shame is placed on a person or group for actions disapproved of by the community, usually as a form of discipline, and results in disparagement and distancing of the relationship. This is often connected with uncleanness.

Honor is esteem given an individual or group for actions approved by the community. It brings a closer relationship and a higher position in the community.

## MUSLIMS AND THE GUILT-INNOCENCE GOSPEL

Most Muslims, and many other unreached peoples, think and live in communal terms involving honor and shame. So gospel presentations to Muslims in terms of guilt and innocence often encounter resistance every step of the way:

Christian: "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for wwyour life."

Muslim: "Nope. Allah only loves believers."

C: "Man is a sinner."

M: "Nope. He is only weak."

C: "The wages of sin is death."

M: "Nope. Allah can have mercy on whomever He wants."

C: "So Jesus died—" (interrupted mid-sentence)

M: "Nope. Jesus didn't die, Allah took him off the cross."

C: "...to pay for our sins."

M: "Nope. Nobody can pay for anybody else's sins."

The guilt/innocence gospel is often not received as good news by Muslims because they just don't understand it. It doesn't make sense to them or "scratch where they itch." But I get a very different response when I talk in terms of shame and honor.

## MUSLIMS AND THE HONOR-SHAME GOSPEL

Many Muslims feel an honor deficit, and an honor/shame presentation of the gospel helps them grasp the Good News on a very deep level. Instead of "Nope, nope, nope" they say "yeah, yeah, yeah," nodding in agreement every step of the way.

When we share in this way, they find that it really is "Good News"!

Here is how I might share the whole picture on a napkin with my friend Ahmed, a Muslim from an honor/shame culture.

J: Assalamu 'alikum! [warm traditional greeting]

A: Wa alikum salam! [greeting warmly returned]

J: Could I share with you the big picture of God's "Straight Path" according to the Old Testament [Taurat] and the New Testament [Injil]?

A: Certainly!

[As much as possible we simply ask questions to draw out what he already knows that agrees with the Bible, leading him to affirm the honored position into which Adam was created.]

J: You remember the prophet Adam. Where was he created?

A: In Paradise, in the garden!

J: What was his position?

A: He was held in great honor. He was Allah's Regent on earth!

J: What was his provision like?

A: He had everything he needed!

J: What kind of responsibility did he have?

A: He was given responsibility for the names of all the animals!

J: What kind of relationship did he have with God?

A: He had a very special, close relationship with Allah!

J: And what was Adam's relationship with creation?

A: He had an excellent relationship with the animals and his wife.

[Next we explore how Adam brought shame on the human race.]

J: So then what happened? Is Adam still in the Garden?

A: No! Iblis tricked him.

J: Right, and what was Adam tricked into doing?

A: Adam disobeyed and did what he was not supposed to do.

J: What happened when he disobeyed?

A: He was thrust out of the Garden.

J: So then what was his situation?

A: He felt fear and great shame!

J: Did Adam have clothes when God expelled him from the Garden?

A: No. He was naked, and Allah had to clothe him.

J: Did he still have his same position and provision?

A: No, he lost both his position and provision.

J: Did he still have great responsibilities and a close

relationship with God?

A: No, he lost those.

J: What is it like for someone to have something of great value and lose or waste it?

A: It brings great shame and dishonor.

J: When Adam was shamed like this, did he try to cover his nakedness?

A: Yes, he did! I think he used leaves.

J: Did that work?

A: No. Allah sees everything!

[Now we make the story personal.]

J: Now if a father does something shameful, what happens to the rest of the family?

A: He brings shame on the whole family!

J: So this story isn't just about Adam, it is about us, right?

A: Yes, Adam's story is our story too. We are all sons of Adam.

[Then we discuss God's response to the situation.]

J: So what did God do then for Adam?

A: He clothed him and covered his shame.

J: The Old Testament says God covered Adam with an animal skin. How do we normally get an animal skin?

A: Normally we have to kill an animal.

J: So it appears that God shed the blood of an innocent animal to cover Adam's shame. Do you think this is an important sign regarding how God wants to cover our shame?

A: Absolutely!

J: There is something similar in the story of when Abraham was going to sacrifice his son. Do you remember what God did?

A: Allah Himself provided a great Korban, or sacrifice!

J: Moses also had the people sacrifice innocent animals. In fact, we see with many of the prophets this sign of an innocent sacrifice, don't we?

A: Yes, all of the prophets offered sacrifices, and to this day we celebrate the great sacrifice Allah provided to Abraham!

J: So is God's response to Adam and the other prophets a sign for us today?

A: Yes, the prophets are signs to lead us to Allah's "Straight Path."

[We conclude with how this affects us personally.]

J: Adam disobeyed God and brought great shame on himself. I too have disobeyed God, and brought shame on

myself and my family. The New Testament says that we have all disobeyed and brought shame on ourselves, and that the result of such shame is eternal separation from God. Is this right?

A: Yes. Unless Allah shows us mercy and forgives us, we are all condemned to eternal shame.

J: If someone is poor, unclean or shameful, can they make someone else rich, clean or honorable? Can anyone who lives with Adam's shame restore us to a place of honor before God?

A: No.

J: Is there an in-between place? Can one disobey and dishonor God and escape the shame we inherit from Adam?

A: No. Apart from Allah's mercy we have no way out of our shame before Him.

J: If you brought shame to your family, can you simply return home and pretend nothing happened?

A: No. Someone close to my father, whom he honors, must come and reconcile me and restore my honor.

J: The New Testament tells that God showed us mercy by sending someone with the highest honor to restore us to Him, someone to whom all the prophets point—who honored God by living a sinless life. And the New Testament tells us that he became the perfect sacrifice to do what animal sacrifices could never do to restore our relationship with God. Do you know who that is?

A: The prophet Issa?

J: The New Testament tells us that Jesus was more than a prophet. He was also the very Word of God, born through the Spirit of God, so he has the very nature of God.<sup>1</sup> There is no one else with this kind of relationship with God. God sent him to deliver us from our shame. The New Testament tells us that, by the will of God, Jesus is the path by which our honor can be restored and we can be reconciled to God. Jesus took our shame when He died, and God honored him when He resurrected him. All who trust in him as their mediator will have their shame removed. Could this be the Straight Path you have been looking for?

A: Yes, I would like to learn more about this. Could we read the Injil together?

J: Let's start with the story of Jesus in the first book of the New Testament, Matthew. When would you like to meet to read this story together? (MF)

<sup>1</sup> Later we'll tackle the difference between what a Muslim understands and what the Bible means by the phrase "Son of God."

# HONOUR/SHAME DYNAMICS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



## SANDRA FREEMAN

Sandra is from Brisbane, Australia and has served alongside her “MK” husband in Botswana, Africa since 2001 with a focus on discipling and providing literature and media resources. God used many unexpected trials, including betrayal and theft, to provoke her search into the local influence of honor and shame. With a national co-worker she is now researching African honor/shame dynamics, and producing resources for more effective evangelism and discipleship.  
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“A thief is only a thief when caught with the goods”— Setswana proverb  
My husband and I have been discipling and mentoring believers in Botswana since 2001. Like many others, we have been perplexed and troubled at the shallowness and hidden sin in the Church. Until I came to understand the role of honour/shame dynamics in our context, I often wondered, “Why does there seem to be no sense of guilt here, except when there is also shame in getting caught?”

### Fear, Shame or Guilt: Africa = Fear...or does it?

In 1934, Anthropologist Ruth Benedict<sup>1</sup> popularised a distinction between Western “guilt” cultures and Eastern “shame” cultures. Twenty years later, Eugene Nida<sup>2</sup> proposed the taxonomy of cultures widely embraced by missionaries today: “fear,” “shame” or “guilt.” (These labels were later refined to “honour/shame,” “innocence/guilt” and “power/fear.”) Missiological texts often classify cultures into one or another of these categories, even though more recent research indicates that a mixture of these are present in every culture.<sup>3</sup>

Africa, and more specifically Sub-Saharan Africa, is widely classified as a “power/fear” culture, and excluded from lists of honour/shame cultures by major authors (e.g. Timothy Tennent, Roland Muller,<sup>5</sup> and Ed Welch<sup>6</sup>). As a result, cross-cultural workers preparing for service in Africa are routinely taught, as I was, that “Africa is a power/fear culture.”

Sub-Saharan Africa does have a significant power/fear emphasis, and this understanding is essential for effective ministry here. Yet the *fear* classification for Sub-Saharan Africa cultures can hinder us from seeing the significant presence and interrelationship of honour/shame dynamics. Understanding the fundamental overlap between “fear” and “shame” cultures will improve our understanding of how to minister in this context.

### Connecting Fear and Shame

Fear and shame are not two independent societal influences. Rather, shame and fear are two sides of the same coin, and it is impossible to have one without the other. Consider these definitions (emphasis added in each):

- Oxford Dictionary—in a *shame culture* conformity of behaviour is maintained through the individual’s *fear* of being shamed.
- Brené Brown—*shame* is the *fear* of disconnection.<sup>7</sup>
- Juanita Ryan—part of the experience of *shame* is the *fear* of being found out and exposed.<sup>8</sup>

Right back in Eden shame was expressed with fear: “I was afraid because I was naked



and I hid myself” (Gen. 3:10). Throughout the Bible we see power and honour coupled, as well as fear and shame (e.g. Ps 110, 8:6; Ro 1:16; Col 2:13-15). And while guilt and shame are different, they are also closely related both in the Bible and in contemporary societies.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, *fear* relates largely to the spirits of deceased ancestors. But what is feared? It is *what* the ancestors (and the elders who will soon be ancestors) will do if they are not properly *honoured* through preservation of the tribal and cultural values of which the ancestors have left the elders as guardians. In this context, these values are not to be questioned, and every member of the community lives to avoid *dishonouring* and angering the ancestors—and thus bringing *shame* on the community elders. This translates directly to fear of bringing *shame* on one’s family in the eyes of the elders, the village, and the tribe.

### The Collectivistic Factor

Beyond the historical trichotomy of guilt, shame and fear cultures, missiologists and anthropologists alike now also employ a dichotomy between “individualistic” and “collectivistic” cultures. No culture is exclusively one or the other, but Western societies are generally classified as “individualistic”—emphasising personal choice and responsibility—while the non-Western world is generally classified as “collectivistic”—emphasising conformity with societal expectations.

Sub-Saharan Africa is rightly understood as collectivistic. Yet there are such remarkable similarities between “collectivistic” societies and “shame” cultures that some astute observers are concluding that collectivistic societies are inherently shame cultures.<sup>9</sup>

Collectivistic cultures train their members from birth to need the approval and acceptance of those around them, and to draw their identity from how well they “fit” and belong to the group. And honour/shame is the mechanism by which this training is applied.

When I arrived on the field, though no mention was made of “honor/shame” cultures, my orientation incorporated behavioural contrasts between individualistic and collectivistic societies, including “always tell the truth” vs. “never disappoint or bring shame.”

### Implications for Sub-Saharan Africa

When an African Christian must choose between lying (to protect an elder’s reputation and honour) or speaking the truth (which will shame and dishonour the elder) they often think “God will forgive me and my elder will not, so I will lie.”

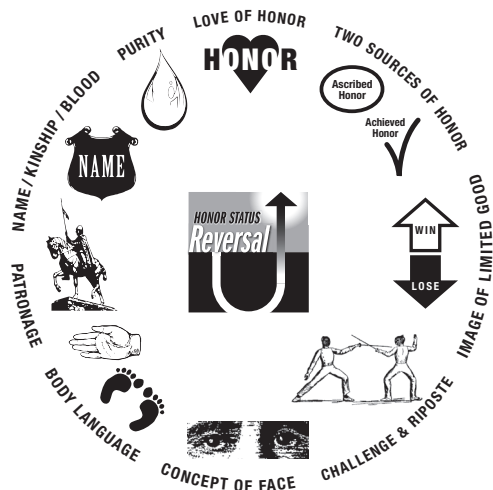


Recognizing the centrality of honour/shame dynamics to African tribal cultures can have a profound benefit both for discipleship within the church and outreach to the lost. Beliefs ingrained from birth—that tribal/family elders and ancestors must be honoured—can and must be addressed from the framework of biblical honour and shame. Otherwise many will remain in the confusion and bondage of cultural strongholds. But by connecting believers with the honour/shame dynamics in the Bible, they can discover that God wants all honour—both ours and our elders—to be rooted in our relationship with Him and our integrity before Him as we “speak the truth in love.”

And among the lost, both in the reached peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa and within an estimated 800 unreached peoples there,<sup>10</sup> it is essential that the gospel address not only their guilt but also their fear of shame. We must help them realise that the honour God longs to bestow upon them is eternal, and greater than any honour they, their family and their people could gain or lose on earth. MF

- <sup>1</sup> *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: 1934)
- <sup>2</sup> *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* by Eugene Nida (Joanna Cotler Books: 1954)
- <sup>3</sup> *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* by Timothy Tennent, (Zondervan: 2007), p 79-80
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p. 79
- <sup>5</sup> *Honour and Shame, Unlocking the Door* by Roland Muller (Xlibris: 2001), p. 20
- <sup>6</sup> *Shame Interrupted* by Ed Welch (New Growth Press: 2012), p 27
- <sup>7</sup> *Daring Greatly* by Brene Brown (2012), p 68
- <sup>8</sup> *Let Go of Shame*, by Juanita Ryan, a July 1, 2010 blog post on The National Association for Christian Recovery, accessed 16 Sept 2014.
- <sup>9</sup> *Leading Across Cultures* by James Plueddemann (IVP Academic: 2009), p. 118, and *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World* by Werner Mischke (Mission One: 2015)
- <sup>10</sup> *Joshua Project* JoshuaProject.net, accessed 15 Sept 2014, reports 867 “unreached people groups” in Sub-Saharan Africa (West, East, Central and Southern Africa)

# Quick Guide to Honor/Shame Dynamics in the Bible



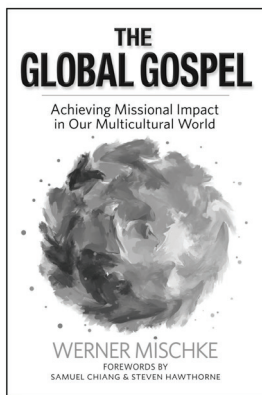
"The honor/shame wheel"—nine dynamics and one motif

How can the honor/shame dynamics common to the Bible and many Majority World societies be used to contextualize the gospel of Christ in order to make it more widely understood and accepted?

The *Global Gospel* demonstrates how each dynamic in the "honor/shame wheel" scripturally overlaps with the atonement and salvation through Jesus Christ.











The book offers fresh ways to understand and articulate the gospel—so that the good news of Jesus may better resonate with more persons and peoples in our multicultural world.

[globalgospelbook.org](http://globalgospelbook.org)



## FOOTNOTES

1. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p. 5.
2. Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualizing Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), p. 63.
3. Neyrey, p. 15.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
7. Christopher Flanders, *About Face: Rethinking Face for 21st Century Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), p. 1.
8. This definition is adapted from Robin Stockitt, *Restoring the Shamed: Towards a Theology of Shame* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), Kindle locations 2679–81.
9. Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), p. 86.
10. Patronage in Ancient Rome, Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patronage\\_in\\_ancient\\_Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patronage_in_ancient_Rome), accessed 28 May 2013.
11. David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 158.
12. Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World* (Scottsdale, AZ: Mission ONE, 2014), p. 161–2.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 181–2.

Honor/shame dynamic	Description	Comment / representative Scriptures
 Love of honor	Love of honor can motivate the worst and best of behaviors. • "The ancients name love of honor and praise as their premier value." <sup>1</sup> • The Greeks even had a word for it— <i>philotimia</i> . <sup>2</sup>	• OT: Ex 33:17–20; Ps 57:8 • NT: Mk 9:33–34; 10:35–45; Jn 5:44; 12:42–43; Rom 2:6–8
 Two sources of honor	"Worth and value are either <i>ascribed</i> to individuals by others, or they are <i>achieved</i> by them." <sup>3</sup> • <b>Ascribed honor</b> "refers to the granting of respect and given to a person from members of the basic institutions of antiquity, namely: family/kinship or state/politics." <sup>4</sup> • <b>Achieved honor</b> refers to honor gained by competition, aggression, warfare, or envy.	Regarding the ascribed and achieved honor of Jesus Christ: • Ascribed honor: Mt 1:1–17; 3:17 • Achieved honor: Phil 2:6–11 • Ascribed and achieved: Heb 1
 Image of limited good	"The belief that everything in the social, economic, natural universe ... everything desired in life: land, wealth, respect and status, power and influence ... exist in finite quantity and are in short supply." <sup>5</sup> If you gain, I lose; it's a "zero-sum game."	• 1 Sam 18:6–9 shows the <i>image of limited good</i> and win-lose thinking. • Phil 1:18–24 reveals the antithesis of the <i>image of limited good</i> ; win-win thinking
 Challenge & riposte	"Riposte" is a term used in the sport of fencing, meaning "a quick return thrust." Socially it means, "a clever reply to an insult." There are four steps to <i>challenge and riposte</i> : • Claim of worth or value • Challenge to that claim or refusal to acknowledge claim • Riposte or defense of the claim • Public verdict of success awarded to claimant or challenger <sup>6</sup>	• Many of the exchanges between Jesus and the Pharisees were characterized by honor competition— <i>challenge and riposte</i> : Mat 12:8–16, 23; Luke 13:10–17 • Phil 2:6–11 may also be seen as a cosmic example of <i>challenge and riposte</i>
 Concept of face	• "Face" is a "metaphor representing a type of interpersonal social honor and identity projection." <sup>7</sup> • The concept of "face" in Scripture has two parts. First, humanity's shame before God is the result of sin and is expressed by turning away and hiding from the face of God. Second, humanity's redemption and healing from shame comes when people turn to, and are given peace before, the face of God. <sup>8</sup>	• OT: Gn 3:8; 4:4–16; Is 59:2; Nm 6:22–27; Ps 34:5; 67:1 • NT: 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6; Rv 22:34–5
 Body language	In the social world of the Old and New Testaments, the most honorable parts of the body were considered to be the head, face and hands. One of the most shameful body parts was considered to be the feet. <sup>9</sup>	Ps 110:1 (cf. Ps 8:6)—perhaps the most-quoted verses in the NT: Mt 22:43–44; 26:64; Mk 12:36; 16:19; Lk 20:41–44; Acts 2:33–35; 1 Cor 15:24–27; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13
 Patronage	"Patronage was the distinctive relationship in ancient Roman society between the ... 'patron' and his 'client.' The relationship was hierarchical, but obligations were mutual. The [patron] was the protector, sponsor, and benefactor of the client." <sup>10</sup> The client repaid this with loyalty and honor.	• Patrons (benefactors) specifically referenced (Lk 7:25; 22:5) • Phoebe is a patron to Paul (Rom 16:1–2)
 Name/kinship/blood	In the ancient world, people are not just taken on their "merits." Honor "begins with the merits (or debits) of their lineage, the reputation of their ancestral house. Greeks and Romans receive a basic identity from their larger family: for Romans this takes the form of including the clan name in the name of each individual." <sup>11</sup>	• OT: Gn 12:2; Ps 79:9; 96:8; 102:15; Is 42:8; 43:7; Mal 1:16 • NT: Jn 5:43; 12:27–28; 1 Jn 2:12
 Purity	"Purity is the condition or perception that one is acceptable before a holy God according to a specific system of codes. These codes define boundaries for what is holy, common, clean, unclean, and abomination." <sup>12</sup>	• OT: All of Leviticus, especially chapters 11–18; Ez 46:20; 44:19 • NT: Mt 9:18–26; Lk 5:12–14; Mk 5:1–20; 1 Jn 1:8–9; Heb 9:13–14
 Honor-status reversal	• Is a motif of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation • When a person, family, or people have whatever degree of esteem, respect, privilege, power, or authority before a community turned the other way around. • Honor-status reversal can be classified by ending status: 1) <i>Ending in honor</i> : Honor-to-shame-to-honor, or simply, shame-to-honor. 2) <i>Ending in shame</i> : Shame-to-honor-to-shame, or simply, honor-to-shame. <sup>13</sup>	Prime example is Christ—pre-incarnate glory, incarnation, death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension to exalted honor (Phil 2:5–11). OT accounts of honor-status reversal include Adam & Eve, Joseph, Job, David, Daniel, Esther, and numerous passages in the prophets. NT examples include many passages in the Gospels, Paul, Peter, and Revelation.

By Werner Mischke, [werner@mission1.org](mailto:werner@mission1.org). © 2015 Mission ONE. The overview may be downloaded at [globalgospelbook.org/overview](http://globalgospelbook.org/overview)

# HONOR AND SHAME BEYOND THE GOSPEL

BY ROLAND MULLER

**B**ack in 1999, I was sharing with a fellow missionary my struggles in communicating the gospel with Muslims. His offhand comment completely changed my world: “That’s because Arabs live in a shame-based culture.” His sentence stunned me. For twenty years I had ministered to Arabs, yet never once heard the term “shame-based culture.”

As I gently pursued this awareness, God brought various people across my path to introduce me to new facets of honor and shame. Some pointed to Genesis, others spoke of guilt-based or fear-based cultures, and others led me to see that the Bible itself was written in the context of cultures which revolved around honor and shame.

In 2001 we timidly published the first edition of *Honor and Shame*. One close friend and fellow researcher protested that there was a lot more to be learned. I agreed, but I wanted feedback from missionaries in other places. Were we pursuing something important or on a rabbit trail?

We soon began to hear from excited missionaries working all over the world—among Aboriginal peoples in the deserts of Australia to the frozen Canadian northlands. I had never been to Pakistan but a Pakistani wrote, “You are the first westerner to understand my culture . . . .” When I used concepts of honor and shame, Arabs would sit and listen to me like never before as we talked of things that were important to their worldview.

I soon discovered that using honor and shame to present the gospel is only one small part of the picture. In most cultures honor and shame shape the foundational dynamics of creating and building fellowships of believers, and in such contexts, social relationships and community function very differently than in guilt-based cultures.

In the formation of Christian communities within honor and shame cultures I am still very much a learner. I am rooted in the guilt-based culture in which I was raised, and often feel like I am on the outside, looking through the window. This will generally be the case for those like me—who have not grown up in honor and shame cultures; we will always be handicapped in relating the biblical honor and shame culture to the local honor and shame culture.

I urge our national brothers and sisters to take up the challenge of applying biblical honor and shame dynamics to today’s honor and shame communities. We long for the Holy Spirit to do His work of effectively communicating the gospel to and through those who live in the honor and shame paradigm.

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## ROLAND MULLER

“Roland Muller” has been serving among Muslim communities in the Middle East and North America for more than three decades. His writings have played an important role in awakening the mission community to the themes of honor and shame in the Muslim world. He is the author of *Honor & Shame: Unlocking the Door*, and *The Messenger, the Message, and The Community*.



# T4T OR DMM (DBS)?

## ONLY GOD CAN START A CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENT! (PART 1 OF 2)

**STEVE SMITH** / Steve Smith works with the International Mission Board (SBC) globally to catalyze learning lessons from and training for biblical Church-Planting Movements. He is the author of the book *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* with Ying Kai (WigTake Resources 2011).

**STAN PARKS** / Stan is a disciple of Jesus helping to reach lost people globally as a CPM trainer and coach. He is VP of Global Strategies for Act Beyond (Beyond.org) and part of the Ephesus CPM Vision with Ethne (ethne.net).

**T**he Spirit of God is launching Church-Planting Movements (CPMs) around the world, just as he has done at various times in history. With Acts-like DNA disciples, churches and leaders are multiplying every few months. In the glorious mystery of God causing the growth, we find that he calls us to join him in the work.

As these modern movements have emerged, the Spirit is using a variety of “models” to start CPMs. Perhaps the majority of fruitful CPM models are adaptations of two major approaches: Training for Trainers (“T4T” – developed by Ying Kai) and Disciple-Making Movements (“DMM” – sometimes called the Discovery Bible Study model – “DBS” – taught widely by David Watson). There are other approaches God is using to start CPMs, but these two major models seem to be

producing the majority of CPM results in the world.

We are often asked if we prefer the “T4T” model or the “DMM (DBS)” model. Do we teach more a “Ying Kai” model or “David Watson” model? Is a particular training more of a “Steve Smith” or “Stan Parks” approach?

To which we would all reply:

*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 1 Cor. 3:5-7 (ESV, emphasis added)*

### OVERVIEW OF T4T AND DMM

**T4T** is a process of mobilizing and training all believers to evangelize the lost (especially in their *oikos*

or circle of influence), disciple the new believers, start small groups or churches, develop leaders, and *train these new disciples* to do the same with their *oikos*. Discipleship is defined as both obeying the Word and teaching others (hence, trainers). The goal is to help every generation of believers to train trainers, who can train trainers, who can train trainers. It equips trainers using a three-thirds process of discipleship each week – 1) **looking back** to evaluate and celebrate obedience to God, 2) **looking up** to receive from his Word and 3) **looking ahead** by setting prayerful goals and practicing how to impart these things with others.

**DMM** focuses on disciples engaging the lost to find “households of peace” and beginning a discovery group – an inductive group Bible study process from Creation to Christ to discover truth. While they are on the journey toward coming to Christ (a several month process), they are encouraged to share the Bible stories with other family and friends and to start discovery groups with them. At the end of this initial process, new believers are baptized and then begin a several-month inductive Bible study church-planting phase during which they are formed into a church. DMM is designed to disciple the discovery group to a commitment to Christ which leads to new churches and new leaders who then reproduce this process.

The two approaches are very similar but with significant difference of nuances. They both seek to implement similar Biblical principles to get to CPM. And yet there are enough differences that many are confused about which approach to use. Both systems have their strengths and weaknesses. Both can learn from the other, and have done so already.

## HOW ARE DMM AND T4T SIMILAR?

### Common Goal: Healthy, Sustained CPMs

A Church-Planting Movement is a rapid multiplication of indigenous disciples and churches that sweeps through a population group. Such reproduction allows the movement to outstrip population growth. Multiplication means most disciples and churches are involved in making disciples and starting new groups and churches. Indigenous believers lead these groups, which avoids foreign and unnatural forms of church and promotes long-term health.

Both T4T and DMM practitioners aim to foster Church-Planting Movements that consist of multiple streams of churches reproducing to the fourth generation and beyond. Both of these models prioritize obedience-based discipleship that results in well-rounded, sustained movements: disciples reproducing healthy disciples, leaders reproducing healthy leaders, and churches reproducing healthy churches. Both T4T and DMM focus on the long-term health of the movement.

### Common CPM Processes

DMM and T4T base their models on common biblical CPM processes:

- **Mobilization:** Since they cannot predict who will be fruitful, T4T and DMM practitioners seek to train as many people as possible to respond

to God so that good soil (fruitful) disciples emerge (e.g. Matt. 13:18-23).

- **Training:** Both emphasize “on-the-job-training,” which enables disciples to grow through a “Believe then Serve then Mature,” rather than “Believe then Mature then Serve” process (e.g. Eph. 4:11-16). Both empower and expect average believers to be used by God.

### • Movement Health Components:

Both T4T and DMM models have built in processes for mobilizing laborers and then training those laborers to gain (or better use existing) access to lost people, evangelize them, disciple them short and long-term, form churches and develop leaders. Their models are usable by relatively new believers.

### Common Biblical Principles

Additional biblical principles are common to DMM and T4T:

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IN EACH OF THESE  
MOVEMENTS THERE  
SEEM TO BE A FEW  
KEY VISIONARIES  
THAT GOD USES  
TO BIRTH  
THE MOVEMENTS.

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- **Extraordinary faith in God:** Only God can start a movement. DMM and T4T are not “formulas” that, if practiced, will guarantee movements. They are efforts to align ourselves with the Word of God and learn from the works of God to lay the best possible groundwork for church multiplication. Therefore, they aim to develop extraordinary faith

in ordinary believers that God is working and wants to use them. Both DMM and T4T trust that God will often work miracles to open doors and reach the lost no matter the context.

- **Authority of the Word:** These movements are built on the authority of God’s Word as the source for all belief and practice. Outsiders are not the experts, but rather guide disciples to the Word of God and to obey all they hear from it.

- **Fervent Prayer:** Perhaps it is the desperation of facing an overwhelming task in often hostile areas that drives the CPM catalysts and emerging local believers and leaders to pray more fervently than they ever have before. They pray in faith expecting God to fulfill his Word.

- **God-sized Vision:** These movements seem to arise as God gives a vision for reaching entire people groups, even regions and nations. This end-vision is a God-sized picture that grips the hearts of the believers to attempt great things for God.

- **CPM Catalysts:** The sheer magnitude of a vision that often includes seeing millions reached is so audacious that the initial catalytic team is forced to focus not on “what can we do” but “what must be done.” This shifts them from being church planters to being catalysts that empower reproducing churches to be started.

- **Person God Uses:** In each of these movements there seem to be a few key visionaries that God uses to birth the movements. Their posture of abiding in Christ, willingness to hear and obey God, and tenacity to fulfill God’s vision are crucial. God seeks out those whose hearts are fully surrendered to Him (e.g. 2 Chron.16:9; John 15).

• **Obedience-based Discipleship:**

DMM and T4T practitioners seek obedience-based discipleship over knowledge-based religion. Obedience arises from loving God and obeying his commands (John 14:15). Both have systems in place for encouragement and accountability to help one another obey the Lord, resulting in strong disciples (e.g. Heb. 10:24-25).

• **Leadership Development:**

CPMs are leadership multiplication movements. T4T and DMM heavily incorporate mentoring and coaching elements. Mentoring deals with character and capacity of leaders. Coaching is to perfect skills. Since a CPM is an indigenous-leader-based process, the outsider's primary role is to develop key leaders in whom to invest and help them do the same with other emerging leaders (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:2).

• **Immediacy:** In CPMs the number of disciples, churches and leaders multiplies rapidly. But the goal is not rapidity. Rapidity is a result of the ethos of immediate obedience to Scripture and immediate sharing of truth learned – i.e. to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22-25).

• **Other:**

- Church formation processes infuse the new church with the healthy, reproducing DNA from the beginning.
- Simple format churches allow for high reproducibility in a number of contexts.
- Every effort is made to avoid creating dependency on outside leaders, funding, and resources.
- Planning and evaluation are critical to gauge the health of the movement and guide it appropriately, including adjusting CPM models and processes.

## HOW ARE T4T AND DMM DIFFERENT?

While the majority of T4T and DMM components are similar, there are some key differences. Within each model there are customizations and variations. In fact, many CPM practitioners blend together elements from both. However, the following would be generally true:

• **Length of gospel sharing:**

T4T shares the gospel quickly (one presentation – e.g. Creation to Christ or the Bridge - or perhaps several sittings), issues a call to commitment and then disciples those who accept Christ. DMM has a long evangelism track (anywhere from 10-26 Bible stories from Creation to Christ). DMM practitioners view this evangelism track as a discipleship track since the lost persons are being disciplined toward commitment to Christ.

• **Discipling the saved versus discipling the lost:**

T4T disciplines the “saved” while DMM generally disciplines the “lost” in the initial phase. DMM leaders feel that the latter approach offers a better opportunity to change worldview by the time a lost person accepts Christ and that those who make it to the end of the discovery series are very firmly in the kingdom. T4T practitioners try to deal with enough worldview issues in their gospel approach and then disciple new believers to solidify their kingdom walk (including through baptism and confessing Christ before others).

• **Time to get to church:** In DMM, it is normally at the end of the evangelism track (usually 10-26 weeks) that the groups of new believers are baptized and then formed into churches. T4T, on the other hand, forms new groups



into churches starting at about the fourth or fifth week after receiving the gospel. Baptism usually happens within the first month after professing faith (often within days).

• **Initial inductive Bible study versus lesson taught:**

DMM uses inductive Bible study approaches from the beginning and through the developmental stages. Evangelists and trainers are only facilitating the group to hear from God; they generally do not answer questions. Initially, T4T has fairly well scripted contextualized gospel presentations and short-term discipleship lessons for the first few weeks before moving to an inductive Bible study approach for long-term discipleship.

• **View of the Holy Spirit in discipling** – T4T practitioners focus on discipleship after conversion. They believe that discipling people who have the indwelling Holy Spirit results in a more effective discipling process. DMM practitioners are comfortable with the concept that the Holy Spirit is working in the whole process as they “make disciples” by discipling the lost to the point of commitment shown in baptism and then continuing that discipleship by teaching obedience to Jesus’ commands.

• **Starting with a group or an individual:** DMM almost always tries to evangelize/disciple a group of people—a person of peace and family/friends. When this group believes *as a group*, it is easy for it to become a church and to stand against opposition. T4T, on the other hand, can start with a group or an individual. Practitioners train anyone who believes—whether it is one person or several people—and then help them immediately reach their family and friends. While there are exceptions, many T4T practitioners may not try

to evangelize a whole group but get to group by helping the new believers to reach their *oikos*.

**WHICH TO USE?**


Determining which model to use depends greatly on your situation, your style of leadership and your convictions about some of the nuances. By the power of the Spirit, both have born the fruit of healthy CPMs. The reality is that many CPM practitioners blend elements from both. In Part 2 in a later issue of *Mission Frontiers* we will take an in-depth look at the methods of implementation and how they compare. Included will be some examples of how CPM practitioners are blending the two models and why.

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BY THE POWER OF  
THE SPIRIT, BOTH  
HAVE BORN THE  
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This should enable you to evaluate which would be most appropriate for your situation, or how to adapt and improve a model you are currently using.

The Spirit of God is blowing across the earth creating a harvest in every nation. Yet to move with this wind, we must raise the sails of methods and processes that cooperate with the Spirit. In other words, we need a way to respond to His leading. May your CPM model move the way the Spirit moves! 

# DAVID PLATT BECOMES NEW IMB PRESIDENT



**ERICH BRIDGES** / Erich Bridges is IMB global correspondent. *This article is adapted from a series of articles and interviews conducted by Erich Bridges with David Platt for IMB media and Baptist Press.* You may receive Baptist Press headlines and breaking news on Twitter (@BaptistPress), Facebook (Facebook.com/BaptistPress) and in your email (baptistpress.com/SubscribeBP.asp).

***Editorial Note: Over the last few years David Platt has become one of the most effective spokesmen on behalf of reaching the unreached peoples. His best selling books, Radical and Radical Together have both eloquently made the case for reaching the unreached. We have featured these books and his work numerous times in MF. We congratulate David on his new role and look forward to the***

***contributions he will make toward mobilizing Southern Baptists and the global church to reach the unreached.***

David Platt was elected president of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board August 27th by board trustees meeting in Rockville, VA.

Platt, 36, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, a 4,500 member Southern Baptist congregation in Birmingham, Ala., took office

immediately as president of the 169-year-old organization, the largest denominational missionary-sending body among American evangelicals. More than 4,800 Southern Baptist international missionaries serve worldwide. Platt succeeds former missionary, pastor and Southern Baptist Convention president Tom Elliff, 70, who served as IMB president since March 2011.

In an interview, Platt said God had





done a unique work in his life over the past 12 to 18 months. “This is not something I saw coming,” he said. “The only way I can describe it is that He’s been instilling in me a deeper, narrowing, Romans 15 kind of ambition, where [the Apostle] Paul said, ‘I want to see Christ preached where He has not been named.’ ... He has given me a deeper desire to spend more of my time and energy and resources in the short life He has given me to seeing Christ preached where He’s not been named. The concept of unreached peoples—of nearly 2 billion people who have never heard the Gospel—is just totally intolerable.”

During a February 2014 trip to Nepal, Platt recounted, his team trekked for five days before they encountered a single follower of Christ. “It just gripped me in a deeper way,” Platt said. “I came back with a desire to say, ‘How can my life more intentionally be used to get the Gospel to unreached peoples? Maybe I need to move overseas.’ Then the [trustee] search team contacted me and said, ‘Would you be willing to consider [becoming IMB president]?’ And I’m sitting there thinking, ‘Why would I be willing to consider moving overseas, but not be willing to consider mobilizing thousands of people in a more intentional way to do that?’

“The Lord has made it so clear, clearer than just about anything else I’ve ever done in my life.

### MESSAGE TO MISSIONARIES

For IMB missionaries overseas, he had a simple message:

I just [want] to say to you, more than anything, that the vision of the IMB remains the same: a multitude from every language, people, tribe and nation knowing and worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ.... If you don’t hear anything else, please hear me say that all I want to do is lock arms with you, with what you’re doing on the frontlines, with what’s

Platt, in contrast, sees great value in institutions—if they help nurture Spirit-led movements.

“There is so much value in institutions sustaining movements,” he said.

“That’s the beauty in what God has created, even in the Southern Baptist Convention on a large scale—40,000-plus churches working together, and the IMB keeping



going on back here in mobilizing churches, to go after that vision. I love you, I’m praying for you, and I’m honored to serve alongside you in what is the greatest mission on this earth.

As he looks ahead, Platt offers his perspective on a variety of mission-related topics, including:

### MISSION STRUCTURES, MISSION MOVEMENTS

Some younger evangelicals have questioned the ongoing relevance of traditional Christian institutions, including missionary-sending agencies beyond the local church.

that coalition focused on reaching unreached peoples with the Gospel. The key is [building] strategies and structures and systems that help fuel a movement, that don’t inhibit the movement or cause churches to abdicate their responsibility in mission. ... How can I, from a leadership position, make sure there are systems and structures in place that are helping fuel that groundswell of disciples being made, churches being planted and missionaries being sent, all to the end that the mission is being accomplished?”

## THE BIBLE—A SOURCE OF MISSION STRATEGY

During the conversation, Platt also emphasized the necessity of looking to the Word of God— not only for guidance and power, but also for mission strategies.

“God’s Word doesn’t just tell us the content of mission; God’s Word informs in very practical ways the strategy for mission,” he said. “How can we most effectively multiply churches and make disciples? This is what we see in the Book of Acts: local churches sending out missionaries who are making disciples that form into churches that are then multiplying churches. That’s what we’re after. Let’s put everything on the table — no question out of bounds — and ask, ‘How can we most effectively mobilize churches who are making disciples and planting churches among unreached peoples?’”

The New Testament pattern of missions offers many approaches to missions that still work, Platt observed, including:

### BOTTOM-UP, NOT TOP-DOWN

“There’s a fundamental paradigm that we want to operate out of that sees mission and the role of the IMB not from a top-down, but as a bottom-up perspective,” he stressed. “The temptation is to view a denominational entity as the agent for mission: ‘We [IMB] send missionaries, and we do strategy, and we support missionaries. So churches, we need you to send us people and money, and we’ll carry out mission for you’ — as opposed to flipping

that and saying it’s actually the local church that is the agent that God has promised to use for accomplishing the Great Commission.

“How can we as the IMB come alongside the local church and equip and empower and encourage the local church to send and shepherd missionaries? That’s how I want us to posture ourselves, saying to the local church, ‘You can do this, and here’s how we can help.’”

### MISSION TEAMS

“We want to send people who are making disciples together here overseas to make disciples there,” Platt said. “Again, this is a picture we see in Scripture: Jesus was always sending people out in twos, at least. Paul and Barnabas went out together. You don’t see people going out, with rare exceptions, alone in mission. How [can we adapt] what we’re doing here somewhere else strategically in the world, for the spread of the Gospel there?”

“I think about some missionaries from our church who were appointed [Aug. 27]. They’re going to join an IMB team overseas that’s comprised of brothers and sisters they were with in a small group here. They were making disciples in Birmingham, Alabama, and now they’ll be serving together for the spread of the Gospel in the Middle East.”

### MULTIPLYING RESOURCES

Not everyone is a church planter in the mold of the Apostle Paul, Platt acknowledged. Paul himself relied on a wide network of Christ followers in the cities and regions where he

preached and made disciples. The same is true today.

“I remember the time a guy came to me and said, ‘Hey, I’m an engineer. My wife’s a teacher, and we just figured out we could get a job doing engineering and teaching in (a part of East Asia) where there’s not a lot of Gospel presence. Can we just go there? We don’t know if we count as missionaries or not. We could actually be self-sustaining there.’ I said, ‘Yeah, you count. You will be crossing cultures for the spread of the Gospel. You’re moving to be a part of making disciples there.’”

“When people begin to get that kind of vision for the gifts and skills and education God has given us here, it may not just be for us to stay here, but we can use these gifts in strategic ways in parts of the world that are unreached with the Gospel,” Platt said. “If we can connect that couple with what God is doing through church planters who work specifically with the IMB and come alongside them, that’s just a win-win.”

“When we begin to think like that, we can blow the lid off the number of people who can go overseas.”

## THE RISING COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

The rise of militant secularism—and increasing efforts to make the practice of biblical faith socially and legally unacceptable—are slowly raising the cost of discipleship in America.

“In one sense, I’m thankful for the trends in our culture, and even in the church, that are causing us to ask,

‘OK, do we really believe the Bible?’” said Platt.

“Do we really believe this Gospel that we claim to believe?” he asked. “Because more and more, cultural Christianity is just kind of fading to the background. People are realizing if you actually believe in the Gospel then that’s not as accepted as it once was. It’s actually looked down upon as narrow-minded, arrogant, bigoted and offensive. Obviously, we want to be humble in our embracing of the Gospel but it’s becoming more costly in our culture in a way that’s good—in the sense that this better prepares us [for] what we’re going to be a part of around the world.”

Platt acknowledged that Christians now face such questions as: Do we believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ enough to lose friends, social status, a scholarship or a job over it? Do we believe it enough to suffer for it?

Despite the higher cost to live and declare the Gospel in America, Platt stated: “We’re not going to shrink back in light of the resistance that’s there.” Instead: “We’re going to step up, rise up and say we want to see His glory proclaimed no matter what it costs us, because we believe He is our reward.”

Amid America’s longstanding religious liberty coupled with the prosperity of the richest economy in human history, Platt noted: “We need to realize the clear New Testament teaching that it is costly to follow Christ, that the more your life is identified with Christ, the harder it will get for you in this world.”

He continued: “We need our eyes opened to that reality. I think we’ve

been almost seduced by the spirit of cultural Christianity that says, ‘Oh, come to Christ and you can keep your life as you know it.’ No, you come to Christ and you lose your life as you know it. The more you’re active in sharing the Gospel, the more unpopular you’ll be in many ways, the more resistance you’ll face.

...

“[But] it helps you realize this is what our brothers and sisters around the world are facing in different places. If we’re going to join with them in spreading the Gospel, then we need to be ready to embrace that ‘everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,’” Platt said, quoting the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 3:12.

With most unreached people living in places where religions, cultures, governments and extremists oppose—sometimes violently—the transmission of the Gospel and the making of disciples, Platt said he realizes: “Making disciples of all nations will not be easy, and the more we give ourselves to reaching unreached peoples with the Gospel, the harder it will get for us.

“But the beauty is the more we identify with Christ [in

America], the more we’ll be ready to identify with the sufferings of Christ [overseas] as we go. And we’ll realize, whether here or there, the more we give ourselves to this mission, [the more we’ll] believe in the depth of our heart that He is our reward and that the reward of seeing people come to Christ is worth it. This is just basic theology of suffering in mission. How has God chosen to show His love most clearly to the world? Through the suffering of His Son, a suffering Savior.

“So how is God going to show His love most to the world today? Through suffering saints, through brothers and sisters who identify with the suffering Savior.” MF

**I Refuse... to fear the darkness**

**THE CHURCH WAS BURNED. NOTHING WAS LEFT.**

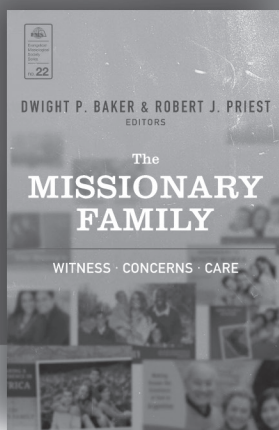
**Nothing except the believers. They chose to forgive.**

**They refused to fear the darkness that entraps people when common sense says, "protect yourself."**  
(From the Reach Beyond Manifesto)

**Refuse to fear the darkness. Sign the Manifesto now at reachbeyond.org**

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# New Releases



## **The Missionary Family (EMS 22)** *Witness, Concerns, Care.*

Dwight Baker, Editor | Robert Priest,  
Editor

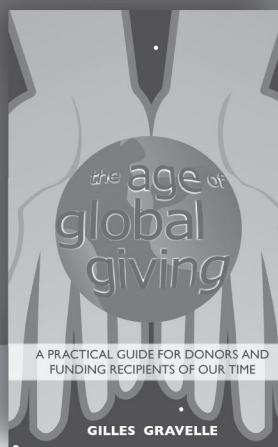
The title of this book points to a feature—the missionary family—often considered to be a distinctive of the Protestant missionary movement. Certainly the presence of missionary families in the field has been a central factor in enabling, configuring, and restricting Protestant missionary outreach. What special concerns does sending missionary families raise for the conduct of mission? What means are available for extending care and support to missionary families? These issues are the focus of the chapters in part 1 of this book.

In recent years an increasing number of reports have surfaced of sexual abuse in mission settings. Part 2 serves the mission community by scrutinizing such matters, offering legal, historical, and psychological perspectives on the topic.

In a new feature, “Forum on Sexual Orientation and Mission: An Evangelical Discussion,” the Evangelical Missiological Society takes up a pressing issue of our day. Fourteen evangelical scholars participate in the discussion found in part 3.

List Price ~~\$16.99~~ • **Our Price \$13.59**

ISBN 978-0-87808-044-1 Dwight Baker, Editor |  
Robert Priest, Editor  
WCL | Pages 350 | Paperback 2014



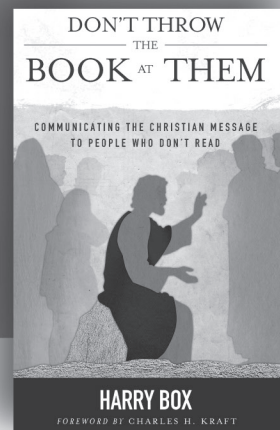
## **The Age of Global Giving** *A Practical Guide for Donors and Funding Recipients of our Time*

Gilles Gravelle, Author

The dynamics of globalization and the speed of change have created greater complexity for Western missions. *The Age of Global Giving* provides accelerated learning for donors, church leaders, agency leaders, and mission workers. As a result, donors can achieve greater outcomes with deeper satisfaction in their giving and their voluntary work. Ministry workers can develop improved vision, values, and strategies that go further in creating sustainable impact and align with the donor values of today. It's a new day in the relationship between donor and recipient, and it's just in time because global mission is in dire need of this kind of cooperation.

List Price ~~\$12.49~~ • **Our Price \$9.99**

ISBN 978-0-87808-539-2 Gilles Gravelle, Author  
WCL | Pages 147 | Paperback 2014



## **Don't Throw the Book at Them** *Communicating the Christian Message to People Who Don't Read*

Harry Box, Author

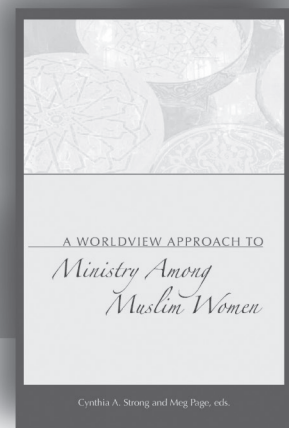
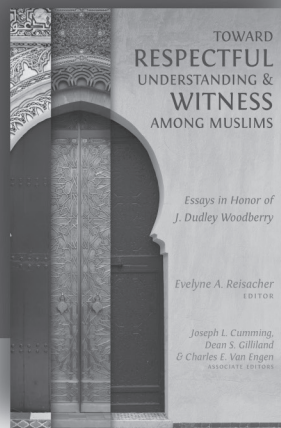
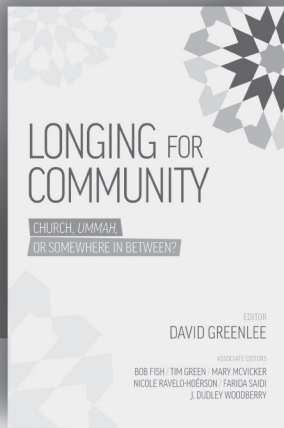
*Don't Throw the Book at Them* addresses one of the most vital issues in contemporary missions. It is a manual for cross-cultural missionaries and national church leaders ministering in societies based on oral rather than written communication. Harry Box, former missionary and researcher in Papua New Guinea and among the Aborigines of Central Australia, explains the distinct characteristics of oral societies, how they differ from literacy-oriented societies, Jesus' ministry to oral communicators, and why effective presentation of the Christian message demands that Western Christians change their approach to orality. The book goes beyond case studies and analysis, allowing the reader to develop a detailed plan for communication.

List Price ~~\$19.99~~ • **Our Price \$15.99**

ISBN 978-0-87808-865-2 Harry Box, Author  
WCL | Pages 239 | Paperback 2014



# William Carey Library



## Longing for Community *Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between*

David Greenlee, Editor

Understanding the strength and unity of the *ummah*— the worldwide Muslim community— and its role in an individual’s identity is essential in comprehending the struggles that Muslims undergo as they turn to faith in Jesus Christ. It has been a place of security, acceptance, protection, and identity; turning away from it entails great sacrifice. Where, then, will Muslims who choose to follow Jesus find their longing for community fulfilled: ummah, church, or somewhere in between? *Longing for Community* compiles the research and reflection of twenty missiologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists— among them Muslims who have become believers in Jesus Christ— presented at the second Coming to Faith Consultation in February 2010.

List Price ~~\$19.99~~ • **Our Price \$15.99**

ISBN 978-0-87808-533-0 David Greenlee, Editor  
WCL | Pages 295 | Paperback 2013

## Toward Respectful Understanding and Witness Among Muslims

*Essays in Honor of J. Dudley Woodberry*  
Evelyne A. Reisacher, Editor

Fifteen preeminent Christian scholars of Islam present their latest research and reflections. The book is organized around three themes: encouraging friendly conversation, Christian scholarship, and Christian witness. Published in honor of J. Dudley Woodberry, it is more than a collection of essays by friends and colleagues. It offers a seldom-available synopsis of the theories of contemporary leading Christian academicians whose work is currently influencing a wide range of Christian institutions, agencies, churches, and individuals. The authors provide cutting-edge and greatly needed resources for developing a better understanding of Muslims. In an age of increasing challenges facing Muslim-Christian relations, this volume offers Christians a unique opportunity to rethink their assumptions.

List Price ~~\$20.99~~ • **Our Price \$16.79**

ISBN 978-0-87808-018-2 Evelyne A. Reisacher, Editor  
WCL | Pages 325 | Paperback 2012

## A Worldview Approach to Ministry Among Muslim Women

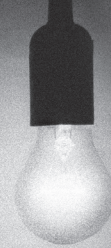
Cynthia A. Strong, Editor | Meg Page, Editor

Four years in the making, *A Worldview Approach to Ministry Among Muslim Women* is a ground-breaking exploration into the way culture and worldview affect ministry among Muslim women. Using original field research from eight different language and culture groups, the book explores a variety of ministries among Muslim women and provides tools to analyze their effectiveness. With contributions from scholars, field workers and agency administrators, readers are encouraged in a holistic Muslim ministry perspective through in-depth studies in Muslim beliefs, anthropological tools, worldview analyses, and explorations in strategic issues and discipleship. The book concludes with case studies and discussion questions to provide a comprehensive training manual for workers and students alike.

List Price ~~\$19.99~~ • **Our Price \$15.99**

ISBN 978-0-87808-370-1 Cynthia A. Strong, Editor  
| Meg Page, Editor  
WCL | Pages 368 | Paperback 2007

# MOBILISTICALLY SPEAKING



GREG PARSONS  
/ GLOBAL DIRECTOR,  
U.S. CENTER FOR  
WORLD MISSION

The story is told of two shoe salesmen who went to a rural, undeveloped part of the world. One came back and said it was hopeless, “No one wears shoes...we can’t sell anything here.” The other said, “Wow! No one wears shoes; no one is selling shoes; we have a

totally open market here!”

While the story is often used to describe the difference between the pessimist and the optimist, it applies to our mobilization speech. Like others, I love to hear a good speaker that tells amazing stories from around the world. But I often learn more about what is and is not happening through a thoughtful, reflective person.

We’ve all heard the phrase, “evangelistically” speaking—by which we mean someone is stretching the truth a bit. We have the same thing in mobilization. We talk about getting the job finished. I was at one event, where “Get ‘er done” was shouted from the platform—to the applause of the crowd—as if more money thrown at the problems would mean we were done.

I understand the enthusiasm. I want to see the unreached reached... That’s what I’ve given my life to for more than 32 years. We must communicate hope. But the longer I am involved, the more serious

I seem to get. That grows from relationships with spirit-filled field servants who, with the best of tools and strategies, are still waiting for breakthrough. Of course, some do see breakthroughs.

My “data” for suggesting we change the way we communicate is related to the reality on the ground in places like North India. In my last *MF* page, I mentioned just one part of India with a lot of people (Bihar, population 100,000,000). If you go from Bihar any direction you continue to see the complexity and massive size of the need.

Throwing more “warm bodies” at the problem—from the West or the East—will not be the solution. Part of the reason is that our way of presenting the gospel typically follows a Western apologetic with a legal/guilt approach rather than that of honor/shame (as we have outlined in this issue of *MF*). It does not work among the unreached cultures that generally do not “revere” Western morals, individualism and materialism.

For example: if you go east from India to China your approach needs to change. The Chinese, in the mainland, do not believe in God, so you have a different starting place. The gospel has made an amazing impact in China. They are now the main messengers to their own people and they have been for years. And as they go to minorities within China (or outside) they—just like us—must learn that effective sharing of the gospel must be done differently.


Back in India, that is not the case. If you start with convincing them to believe in God, they think you are either crazy or foolish. But if, as you continue a discussion with a religious person there, you are willing to say you do not really, fully understand concepts such as the Trinity—the finite understanding the infinite—they might respect you and dialog a bit longer.

A first step to adjust our mobilization speech is to consider a few key questions:

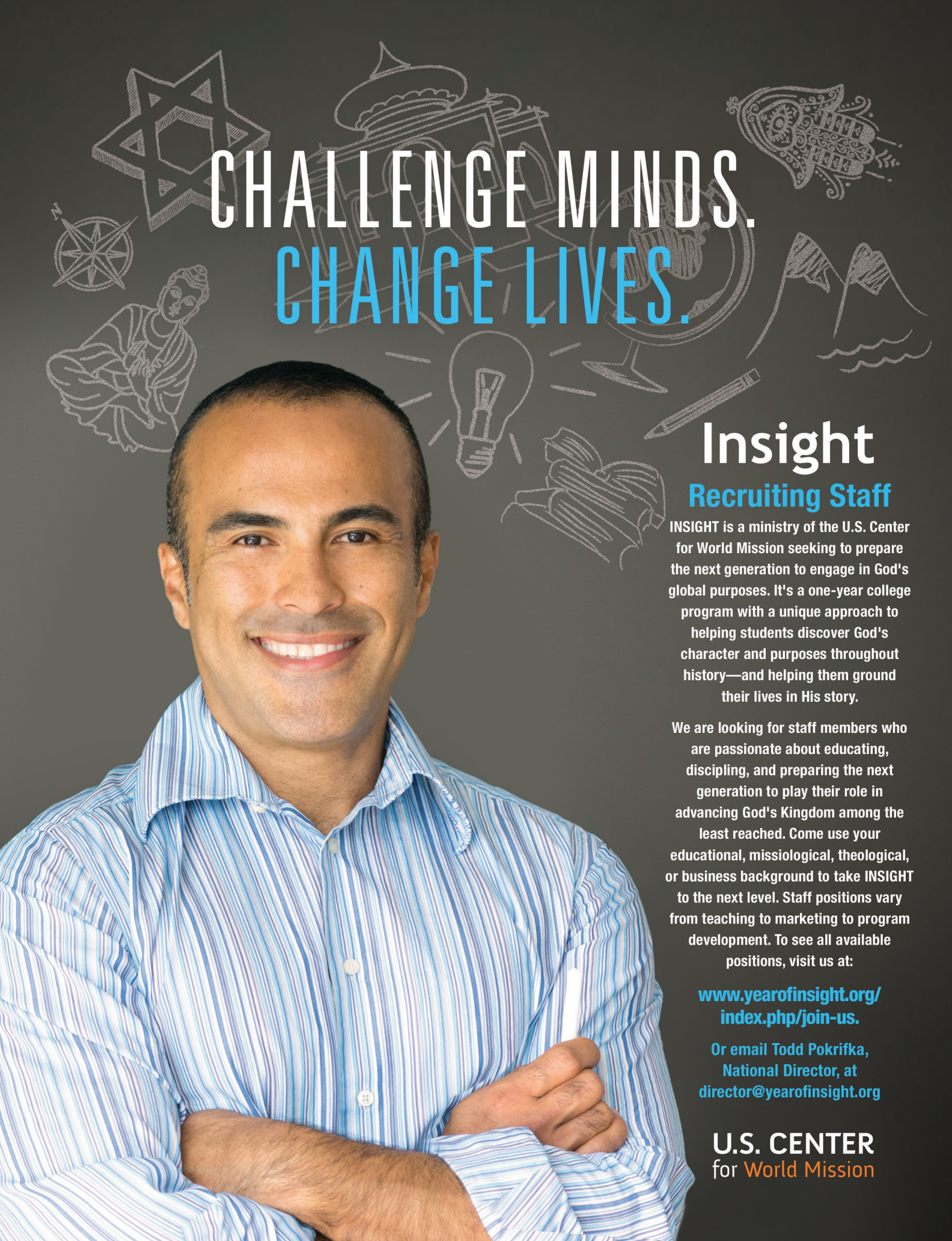
- How do we “temper” our mobilization language to wisely communicate without hype?
- How do we motivate people toward more serious involvement, if we can’t always talk about fast results?
- How do we communicate what we are doing and encourage prayer when we aren’t sure yet that our approach(es) will work?
- How do we share the difficulties and the potential of failure?
- How do we talk in realistic time frames?

I invite you to share your answers to and reflections on these questions in the comments below this article on the website ([www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/mobilistically-speaking](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/mobilistically-speaking)).

We know God can always work faster, but he doesn’t always do so.

I pray that this issue of *MF* will help the gospel to breakthrough in new and deep ways as we share its truth from a position of love, servanthood and humility. 

Follow Greg on Twitter: @parsonsg



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