

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

(Luke 15:20 ESV)



Will the Father cover my shame?

4

Lesson objective: Examine the restorative love of a father as he runs to protect his young son from shame, and then restores his honor in a great celebration.

How does shame negatively affect people?

Task: Read the story of **The Prodigal Son—Luke 15:11–32**. *Suggestion:* Read it out loud to yourself, slowly with drama, like you are hearing it for the first time.

Commentary:

Thus we can translate the phrase, "His father saw him and had compassion and raced." It is not just a slow shuffle or a fast walk—he races! In the Middle East a man of his age and position always walks in a slow, dignified fashion. It is safe to assume that he has not run anywhere for any purpose for forty years. No villager over the age of twenty-five ever runs. But now the father races down the road. To do so, he must take the front edge of his robes in his hand like a teenager. When he does this, his legs show in what is considered a humiliating posture. All of this is painfully shameful for him. The loiterers in the street will be distracted from tormenting the prodigal and will instead run after the father, amazed at seeing this respected village elder shaming himself publicly. It is his "compassion" that leads the father to race out to his son. He knows what his son will face in the village. He takes upon himself the shame and humiliation due the prodigal.

From: Kenneth E. Bailey. *The Cross & the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants* (p. 67). Kindle Edition.

Have you ever been taught from the Scriptures—about God the Father saving you, not just from *guilt*, but also from *shame*? What is your initial thought?

In sharing your faith with people from non-Western cultures, how helpful might it be to have the skill to talk about following Jesus using the "language of honor and shame"?

Four short studies concerning the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame

Here are four short lessons—10 to 15 minutes each—to introduce to you some of the principles of the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame in the Bible.

Definition: Honor is "the worth or value of persons both in their eyes and in the eyes of their village, neighborhood, or society." ... "The critical item is the public nature of respect and reputation." *

Two Sources of Honor—Ascribed and Achieved

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Lesson objective: Understand the two sources of honor and be able to identify them as they occur in the Bible.

The 2 sources of honor:

Ascribed honor: refers to the granting of respect given to a person based upon family, kinship, name, title, government, politics.

Achieved honor: refers to the granting of respect based on competition, warfare, aggression, envy, athletic competition, or "social games of push-and-shove".

Task: Look at the verses below concerning Jesus. Draw a line from the square to each verse representing ascribed honor. Likewise, draw a line from the 'check mark symbol' to each verse representing achieved honor.

Ascribed Honor

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." —*Matt. 1:1 ESV*

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. —*Phil. 2:9–11 ESV*

Achieved Honor

"and behold, a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." —*Matt. 3:17 ESV*

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. —*Heb. 1:1–2 ESV*

What in your own life may be considered a source of ascribed honor? Achieved honor?

Ascribed:

Achieved:

Refugees often lose their ascribed or achieved honor as the result of being in a new land in a different society. What do you imagine is the impact on their lives?

* Jerome H. Neyrey: *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1998), p.15

Lesson objective: Observe that wherever there is a conflict in the Bible, the ultimate issue is not winning and losing—but who gains honor and who is shamed.

One key feature of the honor and shame society—especially in the Mediterranean / Middle Eastern world is “challenge and riposte”—also called the “game of push-and-shove.” This contributes mightily to the prevalence of conflict.

“Riposte” is a term used in the sport of fencing, meaning—“a quick return thrust following a parry.” Socially it means, “a quick clever reply to an insult or criticism.”

There are four steps to this protocol or social code of challenge and riposte, which may be observed in the passage at right— Matthew 12:8-16, 23

- 1. Claim of worth or value
2. Challenge to that claim or refusal to acknowledge the claim
3. Riposte or defense of the claim
4. Public verdict of success awarded to either claimant or challenger

8 “... For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”
9 He went on from there and entered their synagogue.
10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse him.
11 He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?
12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”
13 Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.
14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.
15 Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all
16 and ordered them not to make him known. ...
23 And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” (Matt. 12:8–16, 23 ESV)

Task: draw a line from each step above to the location in the verses where the step may be observed.

Another feature of honor / shame societies is the ‘image of limited good.’ This is “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.” If you gain, I lose ... a “zero-sum game.” Example:

“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (John 5:18 ESV)

As the honor of Jesus increased among the people, the honor of the Pharisees declined. The Pharisees saw this as a such a great a threat to their honor, they sought to kill Jesus.

Conflict, violence, war—it seems unending in the Middle East. How might the values of honor and shame contribute to that?

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Lesson objective: Examine the sevenfold bestowal of blessing upon Abraham as a prototype for the person who follows God.

Task: According to the seven bestowals of honor listed below, draw a line under the appropriate phrase and number it—as shown:

- 1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. (1)
2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:1-3 ESV)

Seven bestowals of honor

- 1. “to the land that I will show you”—God promised Abram that, although he was to leave the honor of his father’s land, Abram would gain the honor of another land.
2. “I will make of you a great nation”—although Abram had no son—and therefore none of the prized honor that comes by having a son to carry on his name—Abram would nevertheless be the father of a great nation, later revealed to be a people as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5). God’s promise of honor is of almost unlimited value.
3. “I will bless you”—this is God’s bestowal of divine favor on the man Abram. In the economy of honor and shame, to be blessed by God Almighty (Gen. 17:1) constituted an enormous accrual of ascribed honor.
4. “and make your name great”—this was God’s promise that Abraham would gain a public reputation of great honor, and become a man of renown in the “public square.”
5. “so that you will be a blessing”—this is God’s promise that Abram would become a benefactor. One can only be a benefactor if one is a man of means; one must first be a person of great honor if one is to be a means of blessing to others.
6. “I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse”—this is God’s promise to pay close attention to the social, public dimension of Abraham’s relations. As blessing is to honor, so also is cursing to dishonor. God is guaranteeing that God will not allow Abraham to be shamed by his enemies.
7. “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”—this is God’s way of explaining the extent of the honor which is to accrue to Abram’s account. God promises that Abram’s honor will not be limited to his own family, local community or region. God promises that Abram will ultimately have a global significance and renown.

What does this say about Abraham’s reward for obeying God?

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