

# Reading your Bible through the lens of honor and shame

1. **Recognize honor/shame dynamics:** In the “universe” or spectrum of words and dynamics of honor and shame, circle the words in **black** in your Bible as you read.



2. **Recognize all conflicts as honor competition.** From sibling rivalries to deadly wars—remember it is fueled by “challenge and riposte” (the ubiquitous honor-shame “game”) and the “image of limited good” (*win-win* was conceptually impossible except as revealed by God; *win-lose* was the only way). Make a note as you read.
3. **Identify examples of honor-status reversal.** Underline or circle these verses with a **yellow** colored pencil. This can range from individual verses to long stories.
4. **Observe words and ideas relative to salvation** (in Old Testament and New) — *saved, ransom, redeem, atone, propitiation*, etc. Underline or circle these words in **red**. Observe the relationship, if any, between salvation and honor-status reversal.
5. **Share and pray.** Talk with others about what you’re learning. Pray biblically; use the words of Scripture. Become comfortable using words like *honor* and *glory* relative to our own relationship with Christ. Pray with others about overcoming shame and experiencing honor in relation to Jesus Christ.

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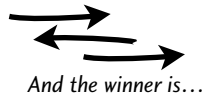
## Primary honor/shame dynamics in the Bible

**Love of honor:** *Aristotle*: "...honor is clearly the greatest of external goods... it is honor above all else that great men claim and deserve." *Augustine*: "For the glory that the Romans burned to possess... is the favorable judgment of men who think well of other men." The ancients name love of honor and praise as their premier value. (*Neyrey*)



**Two sources of honor:** 1) **Ascribed honor:** granting respect to a person based upon family, kinship, name, title, government, politics. 2) **Achieved honor:** respect based on competition, warfare, aggression, envy, athletic competition, or "social games of push-and-shove". (*Neyrey*)

**Challenge and riposte:** Four steps: 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. (*Neyrey*)



**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." If you gain, I lose ... a "zero-sum game." (*Neyrey*)

**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." (*deSilva*)



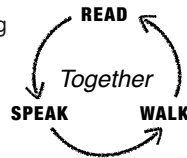
**Body parts:** Feet and other dirty parts of the body represent shame. Head, face, right hand, right arm represent honor.



**Honor-status reversal:** When a person, family or people have their honor status reversed. Two types. 1) **End result is honor:** *Honor-to-shame-to-honor*, or simply, *shame-to-honor*. 2) **End result is shame:** *Shame-to-honor-to-shame*, or simply, *honor-to-shame*.

## Cross-cultural ministry skills related to honor and shame

1. **READ** God's Word through the lens of honor and shame. Reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience. Reading the Bible through the lens of honor and shame is an attempt to know the Word of God the way the original hearers would have heard it or read it. It's an effort to de-Westernize our reading of the Scriptures. Read one book at a time.



2. **SPEAK** using the Bible's language of honor and shame, both in conversation and in prayer. Talk with others **together** about what you're learning. Become comfortable using words like *honor* and *glory* relative to our own relationship with Christ. Pray Scripture. Pray **together** using the honor/shame words found in God's Word.

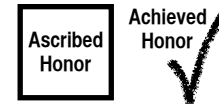
3. **WALK** your own authentic path of shame to honor—in the light of Christ. Discovering the honor of who we are in Jesus Christ has two parts.

- Be vulnerable and real about your own shame**—the shame dynamics of our own lives—whether as agents or victims of sin—and letting the work and Person of Christ deal with that. Personal prayer times and trusting small groups are healthy places for vulnerability.
- Explore the honor of who we are in Christ.** See yourself and your church family as a part of the story and drama of the honor-status reversal of Jesus Christ. Pray **together** with others about overcoming shame and experiencing honor—in relation to Jesus Christ. This sense of honor may be experienced both *individually* with the Lord, and *in community* with the Lord, that is, **together** in the love and ministry of the Body of Christ, the church.

**Sources:** Jerome H. Neyrey: *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1998), David A. deSilva: *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000)

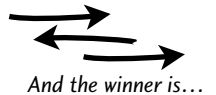
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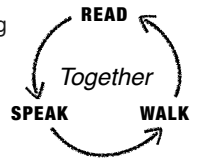
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