



042: Ministering to those from Honor-Shame Cultures – Jayson Georges

Jayson Georges is the founding editor and primary blogger of HonorShame.com. His family served in Central Asia for nine years doing disciple-making, church-planting, and microenterprise-development. His current role is Missiologist-in-Residence at an evangelical mission organization, focusing on developing resources and leading practical training workshops. He is also the author of a book, [Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures – Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials](#).

Tell us a little bit about your book and why it is relevant to global missions today?

- I became a believe here in America, went to a great seminary and then headed out to a Muslim country in Central Asia. When we got there, we realized that many people weren't so much Muslim in practice as they were motivated by these notions of honor and shame. We kept bumping into honor and shame as we did evangelism, as we met with our neighbors and as we started micro-businesses in this context.
- People were always wanting to project a sense of honor and hide a sense of shame and so we began to ask how do we do evangelism considering honor and shame and how do we do discipleship in this context.
- I joke that the book is 9 years of mistakes packed into 250 pages.

What is honor?

- It's a hard word to define in part because it is an invisible thing. It's a cultural construct. It is when the community considers you important and you have a good reputation. They want you included in the group because of the honor they attribute to you.

What is shame?

- Shame is when the community rejects you. Shame is both a personal emotion and is also a negative evaluation by other people – you're rejected and disgraced.
- We often talk about "losing face."
- We talk about honor and shame in different ways. Two common ways we've talked about it recently in North America include:
 - Make America Great Again



- Black Lives Matter

How can we summarize the differences between North American culture and honor-shame cultures?

- Majority world countries are often categorized as honor-shame cultures and North American and European cultures are categorized as guilt-innocence cultures.
- The difference between a guilt culture and a shame culture, guilt culture is more individualistic and we are expected to follow what is right and wrong according to our own cultures. In a shame based culture, it's not rules and laws that govern a sense of morality but the community. Honor-shame cultures are collectivist.
- These are not two distinct categories – they are the two ends of a spectrum. You think about these honor-shame dynamics and the group commitment play out in North America – life in Junior High is very much ruled by honor-shame dynamics.
- This plays out in terms of communication in a concrete way. In an honor-shame culture, the hardest word for people to say is 'no.' They have creative ways of declining an invitation. The more they said 'yes' the more they meant 'no.' When we, as North Americans, hear people communicating indirectly, we consider them immoral. However, they do it to give us honor and maintain harmony in the relationship. When we speak directly, we come across as rude to those from honor-shame cultures.

What is the Bible's view on honor and shame and how that relates to sin?

- There's a lot about honor and shame in the Bible. When you learn about honor and shame, it suddenly jumps out at you in the Bible.
- 1 Peter 2:7 – “whoever believes in Jesus will not be put to shame...”
- There are twice as many verses about shame as there are about guilt.
- So many stories in the Bible communicate this concept that God is working to remove our shame and restore our honor. We often assume that the Bible is about God forgiving out sin, but there is so much in the Bible about God removing our shame and giving us honor.

We have increasing numbers of immigrants coming to North America who are coming from shame-honor cultures. What advice do you have for our North American listeners in interacting with these new neighbors?

- The biggest piece of advice that I give is – eat with people. Food is so important and so symbolic – you can invite people over to your house but as you are invited over to their houses, enjoy the opportunity to be a gift in their home.
- Related to this, exchange gifts with people – when they move in, take over a simple gift – a basket of fruit or something simple for their house. They will immediately understand that you want to have a relationship with them.
- Unfortunately, most immigrants to the West rarely enter the home of a western person. Hospitality is not a distinguishing feature of North America.



When you think about doing ministry and evangelism, and the idea of discipleship, what advice do you have for those who would like to be intentional in discipling their friends and neighbors from shame honor cultures?

- There are two chapters in the book that talk about evangelism and how it plays out in an honor-shame culture. In most western contexts, we communicate the gospel through a legal framework – we use words like law, forgiveness, guilt, punishment, etc. These metaphorical images resonate in a Western context but not in an honor-shame culture.
- When you share the gospel in honor-shame cultures, you need to use relational language. In terms of sin, you want to talk about breaking the relationship between humanity and God. The New Testament portrays salvation as being brought back into God’s family.

Can you comment a little on the discipleship path for those from honor shame cultures?

- An important thing to realize is that their primary identity and sense of ethics is always going to be answered by the question, “What community am I a part of?”
- They are going to view their faith as what community they belong to. In terms of discipling these people, one of the primary things we need to emphasize is that following Jesus is not just about changing behavior but also changing their heart values. Are they letting the world define shame and honor in their life or are they letting the Bible define their honor and shame?
- The church becomes the new honor giving community to people from honor-shame cultures. When the church functions well, it gives honor to the things that are honorable in God’s eyes and give shame to the things that are shameful in God’s eyes.

What other resources might you recommend to those wanting to learn more about honor-shame cultures?

- www.honorshame.com
- You’ll find lots of resources here – Jayson’s two books and other books, blogs and articles.
- There is a conference in June 2017 at Wheaton culture on honor and shame in the gospel. You can find more details on this at www.honorshame.com

If others would like to learn more from you, how might they contact you?

- info@honorshame.com

