

# BIBLE STORYTELLING TO DIFFERENT WORLDVIEWS

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A worldview is the framework from which a group of people view reality and make sense of life and the world. A worldview can be compared to an interpretive filter that allows beliefs to flow through and enables people to make sense of life and comprehend the information of life and the world around them.

Is a fish aware that it lives in water? People are usually unaware of their own worldview.

A worldview gets at the beliefs and assumptions underlying behavior and culture, for example:

- Doing right is more important than having honor and positional power.
- Being considered honorable is more important than being considered right.
- Maintaining positional power is more important than being shamed.

A worldview permeates a culture so thoroughly that it becomes a culture's concept of reality: what is good, what is true, what is valuable, what is beautiful, what is important, what is sacred, and what is real. Are fish aware that they live in water? People are usually unaware of the beliefs and assumptions that influence how they see life.

<b>THREE BASIC WORLDVIEWS</b>			
<b>Worldview</b>	<b>Guilt-Innocence</b>	<b>Shame-Honor</b>	<b>Fear-Power</b>
Primary Concern	Justice	Respect	Protection
Truth	Defines right/wrong	Brings worth/wholeness	Brings peace and light to the unknown
Communication of Religious Beliefs	Facts based on point driven logic	Oral storytelling	Oral storytelling
Decisions Made By	Each individual	Family or community	Authority person in power

## **THREE BASIC WORLDVIEWS**

### **1. Guilt-Innocence**

Guilt-Innocence cultures are individualistic societies where people who break rules and laws are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong. The Guilt-Innocence worldview encourages people to responsibly own up to their failures, wrongdoing, or transgressions and make things right.

Guilt is about what an individual has done. This culture is obsessed with justice, with keeping people in-check with standards of right and wrong. In a Guilt-Innocence culture, schools focus on deductive reasoning, cause and effect, and process. Children are taught to follow the rules and are told they will be innocent if they obey those rules or guilty if they disobey them. Schoolyard scuffles often center on who "started it." In university, students who plagiarize or cheat risk expulsion. People are shocked when they hear of dishonesty by those in power, often demanding they step down from office. Rules regulate what is proper and improper, what is acceptable and unacceptable. In a Guilt-Innocence culture, issues are often seen as right and wrong. Written contracts are more important than anything else. Communication is direct, and can be blunt.

Guilt-Innocence cultures tend to be individualistic in nature. Energy is focused on fulfilling individual destiny and reaching one's potential. Respecting personal choice is important. Adults are kept in-check with rules and laws. They are quick to bring charges against other people who offend the laws with the expectation that they will be found guilty. Individuals desire to avoid guilt and protect innocence.

*The guilt-innocence worldview is shared by most people of the Western World.*

## 2. Shame-Honor

Shame-Honor cultures describe collectivistic cultures, where people are shamed for not fulfilling group expectations. When shamed, people seek to restore their honor before the community. Shame is the painful feeling that oneself is flawed and therefore, unworthy of receiving love and belonging to their community. Shame has a public character to it. You feel shame because of what others think about you or what you believe others think about you. Shame-Honor people sees themselves through the eyes of their family, village, neighborhood or society. People avoid disgrace and seek status in the eyes of the community. The most important thing is the public nature of respect and reputation. *This is completely different from the individualistic personality by which Westerners view the world.*

Societies with a predominantly Shame-Honor worldview teach children to make honorable choices according to their involvement in situations. Communication, interpersonal interaction, and business dealings are very relationship-driven, with every interaction having an effect on the Shame-Honor status of the participants. If a person has been shamed, the way to recover his reputation is to do something that will restore his honor.

The Shame-Honor worldview encourages people to engage in defensive maneuvers such as withdrawing from and avoiding the people around them, denying responsibility and blaming others for a shame-eliciting situation, and becoming hostile and angry at a world that has made them feel so small.

*Shame-Honor is the dominant culture type for most people in the world. About seventy-five percent of people groups with limited or no access to the gospel are from Shame-Honor cultures.*

### COMMON VIEWS FOUND IN MOST SHAME-HONOR WORLDVIEWS

- **Limited-Good**

The view of Limited-Good is the belief that everything desirable in the social, economic, natural universe (land, wealth, respect and status, power and influence, etc.) exists in finite quantity and is in short supply. Therefore, if you gain, I lose. The social/political system does not exist to help people. Rather, it exists to keep people in their places. Opportunities come through friends and family who are better placed than you are, and they might give you a hand up. Since life is a competition for scarce resources, forget about "Playing by the rules" in order to move up the ladder.

- **Face**

The concept of Face is a metaphor representing a person's self-awareness related to their sense of self-respect and dignity in a given situation. Face-Honor expresses worth or status. When someone loses Face, they lose honor and are publicly shamed, and relationships become strained or broken. Having mental illness, having a child who fails in school, having an unmarried daughter who is pregnant, having a disease, or getting tested

for AIDS (not necessarily having it) can cause a loss of Face leading to a loss of relationships, discrimination, and even a denial of medical care.

The concept of Face is especially strong in the cultures of East and Southeast Asia (China, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, etc.). As a result, they define themselves not so much by what they do as who they know. Relationships become the leading functional savior. Giving and receiving Face is the way to enter, sustain, and strengthen relationships.

- **Purity or Cleanness**

Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims have many forms of ritual purification. They value the ideal of purity far more than the Western World. Defilements come in various ways, and for each way, there is an appropriately matched cleansing. Examples of ways to become defiled: burping, passing gas, touching private parts, an unmarried woman losing her virginity, touching bodily fluids, or someone touching you with the left hand (the dirty hand used for cleansing oneself in the bathroom).

### 3. **Fear-Power**

Fear-power cultures exist in animistic contexts (typically tribal). Societies with a predominantly Fear-Power worldview raise children to assess where they fit into the pecking order of every situation they are in and to behave accordingly. Adults learn how to align themselves with the right people to gain more power.

A person's standing in a Fear-Power culture depends on his level of fear or power. These cultures are usually tribal and animistic (believing all organic things and the universe itself have souls). The Fear-Power culture pressures people with the fear of evil consequences from supernatural spirits. The way to overcome fear is to gain power — power over spirits. And, power over spirits results in power over other people. People gain power over others through curses, incantations, charms, or sacrifices. Each of these magical rituals is a means to draw power from violent supernatural spiritual forces and, in that way, to gain power over people. Fear is what controls people and forces them to conform to the culture around them.

*Societies with strong Fear-Power worldviews are usually led by strong authority figures, and very hierarchical. In these societies or organizations, people maintain power through instilling fear in others.*

## **GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTIONS**

### 1. **Guilt-Innocence**

The Guilt-Innocence worldview is a view shared by those in most of the Western World.

### 2. **Shame-Honor**

People from non-Western areas, such as Asia, South America and the Middle East are more likely to come from a Shame-Honor background.

More than seventy percent of people in the world have a Shame-Honor worldview.

- **Western Shame subculture**

Western younger generations are increasingly Shame-Honor oriented. The internet contributes to many youth fearing "internet shaming." College students fear to transgress one

of the “politically correct” norms. Those accused of being “politically incorrect” face harmful consequences. If a moral crusade spreads across campus, many students feel compelled to post in support of it on Facebook within minutes. If they don’t post, they will be condemned. In a Guilt-Innocent culture, you are good or bad because of the rules you obey or disobey. In a Shame-Honor culture, you are good or bad by what your community says about you, by whether it honors or excludes you. In a Guilt-Innocent culture, people feel they do good or bad things. In a Shame-Honor culture, exclusion makes people feel they are bad while social inclusion makes people feel they are good. Moral life is not built on the determining of right and wrong; it’s built on the determining of inclusion and exclusion.

Gangs emphasize Shame-Honor. To disrespect one gang member is to disrespect the whole gang.

Many acts of violence are provoked by the experience of feeling shamed. People react with violence to prevent or undo this “loss of Face.”

- **Common behavior patterns of a Shame sub-culture in the Western World**
  - Group members lavish one another with praise so that they themselves will be accepted and praised in turn.
  - Enforcers within the group build up their personal power and reputation by policing the group and condemning those who break the group code.
  - People demand instant respect and recognition for their group, and they fear that their group might be condemned or criticized unfairly.

The Shame subculture in the Western World is different from the traditional Shame cultures like those in Asia, South America, and Africa. In Traditional Shame-Honor cultures, the opposite of shame is honor or “Face,” being known as a dignified and upstanding citizen. In the new Western subculture, the opposite of shame is celebrity, to be attention-grabbing and aggressively unique on some media platform. Everyone is perpetually insecure in a moral system based on inclusion and exclusion. There are no permanent standards, just the shifting judgment of the group. Everyone feels compelled to go along, and this results in a culture of over-sensitivity, over-reaction, and frequent moral panics. The Western Shame sub-culture allegedly values inclusion and tolerance, but it can be unmerciful to those who disagree and to those who are outside their group.

- **Immigrants to the Western World from Shame-Honor culture**

Global migration has resulted in the Western World encountering people from Shame-Honor cultures. The surge of international students, refugees, and immigrants from South America, Asia, the Far East and other places has changed the face of Western populations with many retaining a Shame-Honor worldview.

### 3. **Fear-Power**

The Fear-Power worldview is normally associated with Africa. It is also found in parts of South America and Asia within tribal groups. Most people from the Fear-Power culture practice animism (believing all organic things and the universe itself have souls), and they practice witchcraft.

- **Fear-Power sub-culture in Western World**

Fear-Power is a natural part of many hierarchies, and is often found in large organizations such as the military, large corporations, sports, and prisons.

Fear-Power is found in sub-cultures in the Western World by those who practice animism and witchcraft. They fear the “evil eye”; they whisper incantations over the tea that they drink in their living room to keep demonic forces at bay; they are very superstitious. Fear-Power is common with people who trust the horoscope.

## **BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS**

People’s worldview shapes their ethics, identity, and notion of salvation even more than their individual personality does.

Western Christianity emphasizes legal aspects of salvation such as forgiveness of sins and innocence. Western Christians need to offer biblical solutions to Shame-Honor people who say, “Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame” (Job 10:15 NIV).

Global missions necessitate a larger role for Shame-Honor in theology and mission. An increasing number of Christians come from Shame-Honor cultures. This shift in global Christianity mandates ongoing contextualization. The global church needs to articulate a theology that equips Christians from Shame-Honor cultures to follow Jesus in their own worldview context marked by Shame-Honor understanding. God desires to bless the nations with honor and share his name with his people. The restoration of status, which all people long for, plays a key role in God’s mission throughout history.

God called Abraham to a life of honor — a large family, a great name, blessings, and divine protection from dishonor (Genesis 12:1-3). These covenantal promises extend to Israel. A nation of despised slaves became God’s treasured possession set “in praise, fame, and honor high above all the nations” (Deuteronomy 26:19). God’s people are chosen to mediate God’s honor to all nations.

God’s Son left the glory of heaven to bring God’s saving honor to all people. Jesus testified to God’s true honor by breaking bread with outsiders, healing outcasts, and shaming shamers. On the cross (a symbol of dishonor), Jesus bore our shame and restored honor. Now, believers in Jesus will never be put to shame (Romans 10:11), because Jesus shares his glory with his people (John 17:22; Romans 8:14-18; Hebrews 2:10).

Jesus Christ dismantles shame and procures honor for the human family. The church now continues the mission of God to bless all nations with God’s honor. God’s people must discern how to embody and proclaim God’s saving honor in particular contexts.

The gospel presentation that has a greater impact on people affected by Shame is: all people stand ashamed before God, but Jesus Christ offers an honorable status via adoption into God’s family. People must abandon their pursuit of worldly honors and get their “Face” from God. Biblical faith means honoring Jesus with undivided loyalty. Following Jesus means adopting God’s honor code for all areas of life, learning to value what God deems valuable. God’s imputed honor empowers Christians to resist cultural disgrace and live for the glory of God’s name, even in the face of shaming persecution (Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 4:13-15). Western gospel presentations that emphasize forgiveness of guilt, have little impact on people affected by Shame-Honor.

In Shame-Honor contexts, restoring honor is a prerequisite for reconciliation. People break relationship when they feel disrespected; restoring Face promotes peace. Western approaches of punitive justice aggravates shame by making an example of the perpetrator. Yet, the practice of “restorative justice” emphasizes reintegration back into community and might be a more effective approach to reconciliation in Shame-sensitive contexts.

In Shame-Honor cultures, most people come to Jesus through a believing relative or the Christian community. Relationships, more than facts, guide life decisions. Following Jesus means transferring one's allegiance and relational obligations to God's community. People tangibly experience God's honor in the church.

- **Reflections on story of the First Sin (Genesis 3)**

God created a perfect world. In it, he placed his creation and he had a loving relationship with those he had made. In eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve changed the way things were. Their actions had consequences for both Adam and Eve, and for God. Those consequences align with three worldviews: Guilt-Innocence, Shame-Honor, and Fear-Power. Everyone is affected by all of these, but generally one worldview has more influence upon a culture. This in turn affects how the gospel is relevant to people's hearts. In understanding these differences, we are better equipped to communicate the gospel message.

- **Guilt-Innocent emphasis**

Couple's reaction

Adam and Eve began their lives innocent in their relationship with God. The moment they ate the forbidden fruit the world turned upside down: from being innocent, they realized they had been deceived, had done wrong, and were guilty of breaking God's command.

God's reaction

God punished them because they were guilty.

*Western Christians are usually guilty of only emphasizing that sin is a Guilt problem.*

- **Shame-Honor emphasis**

Couple's reaction

Adam and Eve began their lives unashamed in their relationship with God. The moment they ate the forbidden fruit they experienced shame when they suddenly realized that they were naked and they desired to cover themselves. From being unashamed, Adam and Eve became ashamed.

God's reaction:

God rejected them and their fig leaves clothes. The couple "lost Face" before God and was banished from his presence.

- **Fear-Power emphasis**

Couple's reaction

Adam and Eve began their lives fearless in their relationship with God. The moment they ate the forbidden fruit they went from being fear-less and became fear-full. When God came into the garden they hid themselves because they were afraid.

God's reaction

God in his power, condemned, judged and punished them.

*Western Christians are usually guilty of only emphasizing that sin is a Guilt problem.*

- **Reflections on Joseph's Live** (Genesis 37 - 50)

- **Guilt-Innocent emphasis**

The individual Joseph was honest, able, true to others, and faithful to God. God enabled Joseph to face all kinds of circumstances. Joseph was taken from his home when he was seventeen years old, he survived in harsh environments, and succeeded as a prominent political leader.

- **Shame-Honor emphasis**

The family relationship: Jacob loved his son Joseph. His brothers were envious of Joseph and sold him into slavery. Jacob mourned for his son Joseph. However, Joseph remembered his family, forgave his brothers and was restored to his father. Jacob experienced dramatic joy when he was reunited with Joseph. The life-long bitterness and animosity between Joseph and his brothers was broken down when the family relationship were restored.

- **Fear-Power emphasis**

Joseph was son number eleven, and should have been number eleven in the pecking order; however, his father distinguished him with the special coat. God distinguished Joseph by revealing to him special dreams. Joseph's brothers tried to keep him in his place with their envy and by selling him into slavery. God gave Joseph power in Potiphar's house, but Potiphar's wife put Joseph back into his place as a slave with her false accusation. God empowered Joseph with the ability to interpret dreams and enabled Joseph to rise to a place of power. In his place of power, Joseph protected his family.

- **Reflections on the Gospel**

The gospel speaks to every person in every culture and addresses their every need. The Bible describes how all three of these basic worldviews are consequences to human rebellion, and it assures us that the gospel provides the perfect solution for each worldview. The gospel removes Guilt and restores Innocence. The gospel removes Shame and restores Honor. The gospel removes Fear and restores Power.

- **Guilt-Innocent emphasis**

The gospel addresses guilt by accusing all of being guilty of sins. Jesus Christ became the perfect sacrifice to take away the sins of humanity. Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life; therefore, he was able to take our sin. Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God. He was pierced by nails on the cross for our transgressions and bore the consequence of our iniquities. Jesus' death on the cross forgives our trespasses and cancels the record of debt that stands against us. Then, Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven. God forgives those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus. People are saved by faith as a gracious gift from God, not by their own merit.

- **Shame-Honor emphasis**

The gospel addresses shame by telling how Christ was shamed on our behalf to restore our honor. Jesus' ministry threatened the earthly honor of established leaders. They reacted by shaming Jesus; they arrested, stripped, mocked, whipped, spat, nailed, and hung him naked upon a cross. Jesus endured the shame and broke its power. The

cross restored God's honor and removed people's shame. Face was restored. God showed approval of Jesus' shame-bearing death by resurrecting him to glory. Jesus now sits at God's honorable right hand with a name above all others. Believers who give allegiance to Jesus will receive a new status where their shame is covered and honor restored. People must repent and turn away from the games of social manipulation, status construction, and Face management. Membership into God's family is not based on ethnicity, reputation, or religious purity, but on one's allegiance to the crucified Messiah. As a result of Jesus dying to take care of our shame, we can stand before Christ unashamed and before the throne of God Almighty in the Holy of Holies.

*It is ineffective to share the ROMAN ROAD TO SALVATION or the FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS to people who believe that sins are actions that bring shame to the family, and if they have not brought shame to the family, they are not sinners. However, they will recognize that they have become shamed by rejecting the Honorable one sent by the one true God.*

*Western Christians need to realize that people with the Shame-Honor worldview can understand the message of the Gospel better than we with the Guilt-Innocent worldview. The Shame-Honor worldview shares values that are similar to the cultures in which the Bible was written and received.*

- **Fear-Power emphasis**

The gospel addresses fear by telling how Christ defeated every power and how he gives his power to his followers.

People in power thought killing God's Son would solidify their authority in the world. Their plan backfired. The cross disarmed the powers and authorities, and publicly triumphed over them. Then in the ultimate display of divine power, God resurrected Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead to a position of power and dominion far above all rule and authority. People must now turn from dark powers and submit to Jesus as Lord. Believers in Jesus are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. God raises believers up with Christ and seats them with him in the heavenly realms, so that they too have a power and dominion far above all other authorities. With constant access to God's Spirit, believers can stand firm against Satan. Satan continues as a lion on the prowl; however, Jesus shields believers from Satan's evil influence. God blesses believers with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm; thereby, rendering black magic and occult practices spiritually futile. As believers walk by God's Spirit in faith and love, they conquer the enemy and God enables them to free themselves from enslaving sins. We do not fear the Spirit world because Jesus is more powerful than other spirits. Jesus conquered death. We do not fear death because after our death, we will be in the presence of the Almighty God, and we will not be consumed.

- **Reflection on the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)**

- **Guilt-Innocent emphasis**

The woman was guilty of disobeying God's commandments when she committed adultery. Her guilt was certain; she was caught in the act. The Old Testament Law said that she should be stoned for her punishment. Jesus said that the innocent should judge and punish the guilty. Jesus did not condemn the woman but told her not to sin anymore.



- **Shame-Honor emphasis**

The woman shamed her family, lost honor, and became unclean when she committed adultery. The woman was shamed and lost Face when the religious leaders accused her before Jesus. However, Jesus removed the woman's shame and uncleanness by not condemning her. Jesus restored her honor when he forgave her and ordered her not to shame God and others anymore.

- **Fear-Power emphasis:**

The woman did not fear God nor his laws, and she had sex with a man who was not her husband. She could not protect herself from the men who accused her and who wanted to stone her. Jesus protected her and transformed her from a broken needy woman to experiencing wholeness without fear.

## **CROSS CULTURAL BIBLE STORYTELLING**

Different approaches should be used to present the gospel to different worldviews. Jesus was presented to the Jews as the Messiah they were expecting (Acts 2:36; 5:42; 8:5; 9:22), but he was presented to non-Jews as the Lord (Acts 11:20). Jewish Christians called Jesus by the title "Christ" while non-Jewish Christians called Jesus by the title "Lord."

Is a fish aware that it lives in water? People are usually unaware of their own worldview.

The Western Guilt-Innocence culture uses point driven logic to describe beliefs. The Shame-Honor and the Fear-Power cultures communicate with each other orally by telling stories. Even the highly literate in those cultures are preferred oral communicators.

To communicate effectively, we need to understand the worldview that influences us as well as the worldview that influences our listeners. We need to consider how to communicate to listeners who are influenced by a different worldview than ours. The Three Basic Worldviews are a useful starting point when analyzing cross-cultural situations.

Seventy-five percent of the people unreached by the gospel are oral communicators who mainly use storytelling for their communication and learning. Western Christians have overlooked the fact that Shame-Honor and Fear-Power people are unfamiliar with point driven logic communication. Even the literate in those cultures prefer an oral communication to a point driven logic in acquiring knowledge or passing on information. Thus, cross-cultural evangelism will be enhanced with Bible storytelling.

Approximately eighty percent of the Bible is stories. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible authors to tell stories to reveal truth, manifest God's glory, and provide for believers' salvation and their adoption as his children. It was imperative to use stories, as over ninety percent of people during Bible times were oral communicators.

Bible stories must find a place and connection within listeners' worldviews for them to be received and believed. A Bible story becomes good news when listeners perceive it as having answers for them and when it fulfills their longings and hopes. They can see themselves connected in a new way to the holy God who has great concern for them. God revealed himself to people through his Son who fulfills ancient promises and hopes for every nation. Following God's Son restores one's identity and purpose on earth. The listeners become part of God's story.

Call it what you like – Chronological Bible Storying, Chronological Bible Storytelling, Bible

Storytelling, Narrative Presentations of the Bible – the important thing is getting God’s Word to people in a way that it is understood when filtered through their worldview.

Sharing the gospel is always challenging, but sharing cross-culturally adds a new dimension. The gospel message is the same; however, the connection point between speaker and listeners can be different. We do not change the gospel but we do consider the listeners’ worldviews. Worldview understanding helps us to see the world from our listeners’ point of view so that we can better communicate the good news of Christ.

An effective method is to tell Bible stories and encourage our cross-cultural listeners to discuss them and find the connection point between their worldview and the story. Our temptation is to tell our listeners how the story connects to our worldview instead of helping them discover how it connects to their worldview. Therefore, when our listeners are discussing the story, we are not leading the discussions in order to teach them. No, no, no! *We are listening to their discussion so we can learn how the story connects to their lives.*

A group of internationals were studying Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24). The leader asked, “Why did the younger son go hungry?”

- An American answered, “He wasted his father’s money.”
- An African answered, “There was a famine in the land. In times of famine, everyone goes hungry except the powerful and their friends.”
- A Mexican answered, “He was an immigrant and no one cared if he lived or died.”
- A person from India answered, “He shamed his father. Anyone who shames his father or mother will himself be shamed.”

The story of the Prodigal Son connects to different worldviews; however, the connecting life-lesson to each worldview is different. This fact applies to any Bible story we choose to tell. We need to help people connect the Bible to their own worldview. That is when they find themselves as a part of God’s story, and God’s story becomes their story.

### **Suggestions for Cross Culturally Bible Storytelling**

- Tell a Bible story. Sometimes it is helpful to tell a cluster of Bible stories.
- Repeat the same Bible story. Then you may want to ask one of the listeners to repeat the story. Repetition is essential for oral communicators to learn the story.
- Help the listeners to discuss the story by asking open ended questions, such as:
  - What caught your attention in the story?
  - Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
  - What problems did the characters in the story face?
  - How have you faced similar problems?
  - Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
  - What does the story tell about God?
- As your listeners discuss the story, listen carefully to discern:
  - Does the story make a connection to the listeners? If it does, continue telling the story to others in the same culture; and tell other similar stories. If the listeners don’t connect to the story, find other stories to tell.
  - How do your listeners connect the story to themselves? Often they find life-lessons in the story that the teller does not see.
- Reinforce the story with learning activities, such as: drama, chants or culturally appropriate music.