

Edward T.
Welch

The Humility^{*} Project for Men

^{*}The Way to Strength,
Honor, and Contentment

"In four short pages a day, take a journey toward the freedom only humility can bring: freedom from pride, from insecurity, and from the torment of comparative thinking. Take the challenge—you won't regret it. *The Humility Project for Men* makes the route clear. Day by day, Ed Welch takes you down the path that will make you more like Christ."

Brad Hambrick, Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church; author of *Transformative Friendships*

"Sometimes you need someone to reframe something for you—to give you a new way of seeing it. This is what Ed Welch does in *The Humility Project for Men*, and it's a gift. This little book takes a concept that you thought you understood and makes it three-dimensional."

Marc Davis, Associate Area Director for Renewal, Serge

"On this daily walk, Ed Welch offers wise love at its finest. The nastiness of pride is unmasked, and the manliness of humility is unveiled. Best of all, Jesus gets the praise for remaking us to be settled and strong under him. I can't wait to invite the men I shepherd to join me on this path. Thank you, Ed, for living and mapping the way."

Greg Norfleet, Director of Counseling Ministry, Briarwood Presbyterian Church

"Rather than reading mere words on a page, imagine Ed is in the room with you as a gentle, tender father leading and helping you draw near to the humility of Christ. While pride is always lurking and luring us, it is the humility of Christ that truly captures the heart. Humility is the way of the Christian because it is the way of Christ."

Nathan Sawyer, Pastor, Grace Church Memphis; online instructor, CCEF

"This is a gem of a book, filled with wisdom. Ed traces the silent thread of humility (or its lack) through our sins and our virtues. It might be written for men, but it's for everyone!"

Paul E. Miller, Author of *A Praying Church* and *J-Curve: Dying and Rising With Christ in Everyday Life*

"In a world where humility often feels scarce, Ed Welch offers men a rich, grace-filled invitation to rediscover this vital virtue. Drawing from years of counseling experience and deep biblical insight, he helps readers see humility not as weakness but as Christlikeness—continually lifting our eyes to Jesus, the true model of a humble heart."

Jonathan D. Holmes, Interim Executive Director, CCEF

“These devotional reflections on humility are vintage Ed Welch. In this book, familiar Scriptures speak with fresh urgency and clarity and the many vivid stories bring theology to life. Things we thought we knew about pride and humility are revisited in ways that draw us into personal engagement with Christ. This is a humility project that will bless everyone’s soul.”

Steve Midgley, Executive Director, Biblical Counselling UK

“Ed Welch shepherds us gently toward our humble Savior. Through vivid portraits of God’s humility, the Spirit stirred my heart and challenged my pride, freeing me to love more deeply. This devotional is a timely gift to the church—inviting us to slow down, listen, and live more like the One who is gentle and lowly in heart.”

Robert K. Cheong, Executive Director, Gospel Care Ministries;
author of *Restore: Changing How We Live and Love* and *Restoration
Story: Why Jesus Matters in a Broken World*

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AND CONTENTMENT

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If you ask me what is the essential thing
in the religion and discipline of Jesus Christ,
I shall reply: first humility, second humility, and third humility.

—*Saint Augustine*

If anyone would like to acquire humility,
I can, I think, tell him the first step.
The first step is to realize that one is proud.
And a biggish step, too.

—*C. S. Lewis, "Pride" in Mere Christianity*

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

—*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.

—*Psalms 149:4*



WELCOME

Humility is probably not your first choice of essential topics. A few weeks of practice in being lowly does not make anyone's to-do list. But Scripture and the wise men who have gone before us tell a different story. They make their plea—our honor, strength, contentment, and rest depend on humility, as do all of our relationships. It is the door into all virtues, and its opposite—pride—brings us into all vices. The ancient sages urge you to enter in.

Augustine wrote, “If you ask me what is the essential thing in the religion and discipline of Jesus Christ, I shall reply: first humility, second humility, and third humility.”¹ His autobiography, *Confessions*, is not a story of achievements. It is a story of a man whose pride authorized him to follow his own passions above all else, the destruction it caused, and the sanity that came from humility before God and faith in Christ.

Jonathan Edwards wrote, “The first and worst cause of errors that abound in our day and age is spiritual pride.”² Charles Spurgeon wrote of his “darling sin” of pride.”³ C. S. Lewis wrote of pride often, and he dedicated a chapter to pride in *Mere Christianity*.

The church's humility project has had many contributors over the years. Here is a small sample:

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Richard J. Foster, *Learning Humility*

Grant Macaskill, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility*

Kent Dunnington, *Humility, Pride, and Christian Virtue Theory*

Dennis R. Edwards, *Humility Illumined*

Jerry Bridges, *The Blessing of Humility*

J. Lanier Burns, *Pride and Humility at War*

Gavin Ortlund, *Humility: The Joy of Self-Forgetfulness*

This short book is another contribution. In it, I will try to respect your time by getting right to the point. Yet since mere knowledge is not enough, after each daily reading I have inserted prompts that will slow you down: *circle, reflect, pray, talk*. I found these steps helpful as I studied humility, so I am passing them on. I found the reminders to talk to the Lord and to talk to other people to be especially helpful.

What surprised me as I was preparing to write this devotional is that humility is an activist. It energizes. It does not simply sit around and defer to others. For example, I am a responder by nature. I ask my wife, “What would *you* like to do?” Part of that style is most likely connected to me not wanting to take responsibility for a less-than-good time if we enacted my suggestion. A few months into this project I suggested, “Let’s . . .” If she was struggling and I contributed to some of her disappointment, I would ask her to talk about it, own what was mine, and pray with her. While that all seems ordinary, it is also raw spiritual power. Left to myself, I am inclined toward self-pity when my wife is not thoroughly pleased with me. I have been surprised by the strength of humility, and I love it.

Meditating on spiritual realities feels like a luxury for which we don’t have time. But there are some matters of such importance that we can’t let the opportunity pass. Welcome to a well-worn tradition that includes kings, prophets, sages, and—as is God’s style—ordinary people like us.



DAY 1

THIS IS HUMILITY

Humble yourselves before the Lord,
and he will exalt you.

—James 4:10

Being a man is complicated. Being *any* kind of human being is complicated, but today men are feeling the complexities—younger men even more. Relationships are harder. Our best efforts don't seem to be enough. Successful long-term relationships are rare. Steady work has been replaced by uncertainty. In order to feel alive, we are left with online jolts from gaming, intrigue, indignation, and sensuality, each adding their own touch of chaos. Meanwhile, many men feel increasingly nonessential; “useless” and “worthless” are closing in.

Is this really the right time to think about humility?⁴

I recently talked with a man who radically owned what he brought to a bad marriage that was headed for divorce. The only thing he and his wife shared was the skill of blaming the other. Then he saw his pride, perhaps for the first time, and he confessed that he had been living for himself—not God, and not his wife. He was only stating the obvious, but pride is too weak to say such things. His wife was stunned and softened. A path to reconciliation opened. Humility is apparently quite powerful.

You might think that humility makes you even smaller. Your impression of what it means to be humble is that you have to take whatever nastiness and injustice come your way. An old saint put

it this way: “You and the donkey must be alike. The donkey says nothing when he is beaten.”⁵ Be a human punching bag, or better, be *nothing* so people don’t even notice when they walk over you. Never judge, because you are much worse than that person. Overall, talk less, give up your place in line, say, “Yes, whatever you say, you are right,” and do what the other person prefers rather than give your own preferences. Humility means you point to heaven whenever somebody says something nice about you. If you are suspicious when you consider humility, you have good reason to be, even though none of these reasons is accurate.

Humility could be easily dismissed until you know these two things:

1. The alternative is ugly. If not humility, then pride, and pride is a killer. It clings to most everything that has brought misery to your relationships. It empowers insecurity, unchecked anger, resentment, despair, hopelessness, and, much worse, distance from God.
2. Humility might seem weak until you know that God became man. Once you learn that your Creator—who is quite impressive and no wallflower—is the humble Servant, humility can catch your attention. It turns out to be the *only* way to become a person of influence, settled in your own skin, deeply and truly human.

WHAT IS HUMILITY?

Humility is first before God, rather than before people. *Humility means that you live before God, dependent on him, with a heart that listens.* Our minds tend to think first of the distasteful possibilities of humility toward other people and the potential injustices we might have to ignore. Don’t go there.

Start with God. Humility is to rest in God alone, listen to what he says, learn from him, and respond to him. From that place,

humility takes action, and other people notice. Here are a few places where you will find it in Scripture.

“I am not worthy” (Luke 7:6). Jesus “marveled” at the faith of a Gentile centurion who spoke these words (Luke 7:9). This man understood Jesus’s greatness, his own need, and the extravagant gift that he requested, which was that Jesus would give someone life. He was among the first in the New Testament to understand the grace of God. Say these words every day and your community will marvel too. In what is ahead, this will also appear as a rhetorical question: Who am I (that you, Jesus, would know and care about me, which you most certainly do)?

“My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). Humility is to know that Jesus is over all creation. He alone is worthy of your loyalty and obedience. You can call him “my Lord” and “my God.”

“Speak, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:10). Humility is to hear God’s voice above all others, to seek out that voice, and to do what he says. This means we have to be lower and *under* God.

“Help.” This appears throughout Scripture, and men are notoriously bad at saying it. The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell, in part, because men didn’t ask God for help (Hosea 7:14).

“Thank you.” Humility is to know that what you have accomplished or any good you have received is not a result of your own greatness but is a gift from God that you did nothing to deserve. “Every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17 NIV).

“My soul finds rest in God alone” (Psalm 62:1 NIV 1984). Humility renounces the human project of reputation and status, which never finds a place of rest. You don’t have to always prove yourself. You don’t have to be somebody who hides your failures, because you are secure in the accomplishments of Jesus on your behalf.

“He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). These are the words of John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said there was none greater. John was bold, unmoved by rejection, and he stood with courage against injustices. Though he was willing to be anonymous, even today most everyone knows his name.

“Jesus, I need you.” The psalmist says it well: “As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me” (Psalm 40:17). Other than, “I need sex,” “I need a drink,” or “I need a break,” men rarely speak about needing anyone or anything. *Dependence* is awkward enough. *Need* is offensive. But when we grow into maturity, this is what wise men say. When you prize the words *poor* and *needy*, good things happen. It is the way you are created.

Humility, we fear, is the way of doormats and losers, but we are misguided. Humility replaces inadequacy and insecure bravado with confidence. Humility is the path of the resilient, bold, sturdy, strong, even-tempered, confident, and those at rest. It is the way of wise, daily decisions and peace in relationships. It is the way of freedom. The secret within humility is that our lives no longer teeter on our fragile egos but rest on something much firmer—Christ himself. Humility is to know that God has revealed himself most fully in Jesus Christ, who is in charge and lives to serve you even at this moment. He is the humble Servant God.



CIRCLE (write, underline, or highlight): One way to engage with humility is to physically circle at least one thing that is important to you from this devotional. What stands out? This reading is longer than the others, and there is a lot here, so you might want to circle everything that stands out to you. Be sure to circle *humility means that you live before God*.

REFLECT: Do you have other hesitations? Write down some reasons that this project is worthy and important. If you want to see how this moves toward something uninhibited and bold, you can temporarily skip ahead and read Day 41, “You First.”

PRAY: What do you want to ask of the Lord?

TALK: Talk to one person about what you are reading.

If you are reading this book with a group, ask one person to pray for you as you go through the coming weeks.

DAY 2

THIS IS PRIDE

Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

—*Daniel 4:37*

Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD.

—*Proverbs 16:5*

Pride stands against humility, and it is formidable.

“I am really proud of my lawn (my work, how I fixed the faucet, . . .).” This is satisfaction in a job well done, and it is *not* what God identifies as pride. If there is such a thing as *good* pride, this is it. When you play a game, you try to win. You are supposed to do that, and the game would be less fun for everyone if you didn’t.

Pride has larger aspirations. Pride wants to “make a name” for itself (Genesis 11:4). Just a little better, a little bit above. Puffed up. It always compares, always judges. Finding fault makes you feel bigger. You might find it strange how other people seem to wrong you quite a bit, but you never seem to wrong them. All this is about image more than character. What do other people see? What are their opinions of you? A winner or a loser? Notice how body image is a concern for men as much as it is for women.

Don’t expect to find it in saying, “I am the greatest!” Anyone who says that is either joking or feels like the worst. Find it when you feel small, insecure, near the precipice of depression because you thought you would be somebody by now. Find it in your heart, where you store those things that are most important to you, in daydreams of

accolades, in a need to be irresistible to someone else, in resentments against those who treat you as someone less than you believe you are.

No matter how we feel, if pricked with a pin, out we come—me, my desires, my wants, what I deserve. Where pride is present, the interests of others are second, and we often don't get to the second thing on our list. No wonder our relationships can be on life support. And our relationship with the Lord is as well. No wonder we can go for significant stretches without really needing God. Once you know what you are looking for, you can find pride everywhere, in everyone—even in yourself.

Watch Jesus's disciples. As they follow him to Jerusalem, where he will be crucified, they are concerned about other matters: "A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Luke 22:24). It's amazing that Jesus did not absolutely freak out on them. Pride caused the Devil to be the Devil,⁶ and God hates it (Proverbs 8:13). But Jesus patiently used this as an occasion to teach the disciples how to grow into true greatness.

WHERE YOU CAN FIND PRIDE HIDING

Arrogance and pride are natural to us. Consider three places where they hide.

Anger. Pride's most common face is anger. It says, "I am right." The other person is the problem. Watch for anger's massive range: violence, rage, threats, blame, judging, jealousy, silence, cursing, slander, sarcasm, and complaining, even if these exist only in your own mind. They all share this: you are the judge, jury and executioner. God is not in it.

Sensuality. Pride also shows up in all sexual imagination and acts that are outside the boundaries God has established. Pride says, "Nothing is more important than my desires." You desire physical pleasure, and you desire to be desired—God is not allowed in. Perhaps you felt guilty at first, but you can easily erode guilt if you practice enough. After all, some things God asks of you are unreasonable,

such as setting boundaries on your desires and loving people who aren't loving you very well.

Anxiety and shame. Pride is harder to see within these experiences because you already feel small and low. Neither anxiety nor shame is prideful in itself. They can both be sheer misery. But pride is apparent when your anxiety and shame can't hear God's words. Although those feelings seem to be so loud that no one's love could break in, God is not just anyone. Even rocks and trees can hear his voice.

Pride has different faces. There is arrogant judgment, unleashed desires, and even isolation and withdrawal. This diverse group gathers when your heart has sealed off a piece of itself, and God is not in it.

Yet even now you can engage the fight. Say, "speak Lord, your servant is listening." Try actually saying it out loud.



CIRCLE: What stands out to you?

REFLECT: Think about the times you are angry, afraid, or despondent. Describe how your own pride might be at work during those times.

PRAY: What do you want to say to the Lord? What do you want to ask?

TALK: Talk to someone about what you are thinking. If someone is praying for you, update them.

DAY 3

PRIDE IS . . . BIZARRE

The king [Nebuchadnezzar] answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”

—*Daniel 4:30*

A child hits his younger brother. His wrongdoing is obvious, and his mother tells him that he must ask forgiveness. What could be more natural than asking forgiveness? But the words simply cannot come from his mouth. His pride will accept *any* discipline other than saying “Will you forgive me?” This, of course, is beyond belief. Four words—just say it. They are suitable and right. But pride hates going lower. Pride has an irrational loathing of humility and even of reason itself.

A teenager wants independence because they know what is best. Of course, that teenager is also quite dependent on his or her family for survival. The bemused parent cannot even think of words that would bring sense to the teen.

A husband and wife quarrel over which of them is right, and each wants the last word. Gradually, they regress to schoolyard talk: “You are just like your mother!” “Oh yeah? You’re sooo dumb.” The less-than-human snarling and growling come next.

Yes, we can look like something less than human in our pride. Perhaps you know the story of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Assyria during Daniel’s time. After he irrationally took credit for Babylon’s glory, we witness how pride is more suited to an animal than a

human. For seven years, this king roamed the fields like an ox, with grass for his food. God let the king's inner ox reveal itself. Only when he humbled himself before the Lord did he look like a man again (Daniel 4:29–37).

Pride is one of the foremost ways of describing sin. It is against God and other people. It is also supremely bizarre and incongruous for humans, who by nature are dependent and have accomplished nothing in themselves to justify their own enthronement. Pride is irrational. God's design is that we live under him. God rules—not us (Daniel 4:26). We live only by the “immeasurable riches of his grace” (Ephesians 2:7), and yet pride has set up camp in every human heart. Though created by God and fully dependent on him for everything, we live as though we have earned our way to the top.

Pride is a summary of all sin. It is also truly odd. It is unnatural, stupid, and less than human. Our goal is not simply to be concerned about outbreaks of pride; it is to find pride absurd, a ridiculous feature of our human existence that will someday be no more. Pride, when seen clearly, is the humiliation of our souls.

We are created with royalty in our veins, but *Christ* is King, and everything we have with any eternal value is his gift to us. As royalty, we take on the ways of the King: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). So we set out for humility, which turns out to be wonderfully human and surprisingly powerful.



CIRCLE: What is important for you here?

REFLECT: Have you noticed how “disrespect” is a near-lethal injury to many men? Also notice how those who are strong—like superheroes, gunslingers, and black belts—don’t have to boast or display their strength. Humility rests in the unbeatable strength of God and the army that accompanies him, which makes you less reactive to criticism. Can you imagine what that might look like in your own life?

PRAY: Talk to the Lord about your foolish pride.

TALK: Talk to someone about what you are thinking. Would this be a good time to ask for prayer because you need Jesus to keep you from being an animal?