

**Edward T.
Welch**

The Humility* Project for Men

**STUDY
GUIDE**

***The Way to Strength,
Honor, and Contentment**

“This small group resource takes men on 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.”

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

“This study gives men a new way of seeing humility, and it’s a gift. Ed Welch takes a concept that you thought you understood and makes it three-dimensional.”

Marc Davis, Associate Area Director for Renewal, Serge

“Ed Welch offers wise love at its finest in this study. The nastiness of pride is unmasked, and the manliness of humility is unveiled. I can’t wait to invite the men I shepherd to join me on this path.”

Greg Norfleet, Director of Counseling Ministry, Briarwood
Presbyterian Church

“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 study, 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 participants 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

“This is vintage Ed Welch. In this study guide, things we thought we knew about pride and humility are revisited in ways that draw participants into personal engagement with Christ. This is a humility project that will bless your soul.”

Steve Midgley, Executive Director, Biblical Counselling UK

“Ed Welch shepherds us gently toward our humble Savior. This study guide 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

Edward T. Welch



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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE HUMILITY PROJECT?

The truly human life is lived “with all humility” (Ephesians 4:2). It is the path of rest, wisdom, honor, and love. The only alternative? Pride. You find it in holding grudges, being right, needing the approval of others, and wanting to be just a little more respected, a little more important. The challenge is that pride is natural to us. Humility will take some work.

The project in front of you requires you to band together, aspire to humility before God, help each other fight against the pride that insists on clinging to us all, grow in ways that are obvious to those close to you, and be a light to the world. All in eight meetings.

GETTING STARTED

Eight sessions together is not much time when the movement from pride to humility is among the most ambitious changes we could ever consider. But from the vantage point of lives that are already hard and busy, it is a lot. Those meetings—and the work done between them—will give you an opportunity to grow, and you can be sure that your friends and family will be happy to release you from whatever you might miss during the weeks ahead.

Our purpose. Humility is God’s desire for us. The project before you is to understand what Scripture means by *humility* and *pride*, and then to find that pride, battle it, and enjoy humbly walking with God through life.

The vibe. The work in front of you will try to follow both what Jesus says and how he says it. Life with him, in his house and his kingdom, has a particular feel. This is one reason that you are banding

together. Jesus brings people together, and he uses our words to help each other, as “iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17). He is pleased when we gather for his purposes. You can be sure that he speaks a blessing over your time, which means that he is determined to benefit you and your relationships.

Since people talk when they gather, you won’t be surprised that life with Jesus includes lots of talking. His house is *not* about monastic silence. Instead, he talks and you respond; then you talk and he responds. Then you talk to others, listening and responding to them, and occasionally one person is so excited that they talk to everyone and we all respond. Talk to God. Talk to your family and friends. Talk to those at work. And listen as others talk. There is a lot of talking and listening and responding in God’s house.

As a way to get into that groove, go ahead and respond to the readings—both the ones in this study guide and the ones you’ll do on your own in the devotional. Say, “Amen,” “What?” “Impossible!” or whatever is on your mind. Raucous is good; it is humility’s lesser-known style. Also, when you read words in bold letters, speak them together. It is a reminder that God enjoys hearing from you.

If you are unfamiliar with how Jesus does things, or if you are new to it all, think of this as a kind of open house where Jesus himself invites you in. As you walk around, everything should look better than what you expected and more like the home you always wanted.

WHAT WILL YOU DO ON THIS JOURNEY?

As with most things, the more work you do, the more you and others will benefit. Here’s what you’ll be doing as you embark on the Humility Project:

- Attend the eight group meetings.
- This study guide will lead you through these meetings. The plan for each week looks like this:
 - Discuss some general questions to get warmed up.
 - Read about the key idea.

- Do an exercise on your own, and then discuss your findings with the group.
- Read the article on a particular aspect of humility, marking anything that strikes you, and discuss the questions following it.
- Read Scripture responsively.
- Pray together.
- Do the assignments in the “Up Ahead” section (listed near the end of every session except the last one). These will include reading the week’s devotions from *The Humility Project for Men: The Way to Honor, Strength, and Contentment*, as well as being prepared to talk about them together and enlisting someone to pray for you.

Please enter. Talk. Work hard, and enjoy the fruit of that labor.

A Word to Group Leaders

Please share the information in the “What Will You Do on This Journey?” section with the group before the first meeting.

MEETING 1

KNOWING HUMILITY

OPENERS (7 minutes)

- What words or associations do you think pop into people's minds when they hear the words *humble* and *humility*? Consider characters from books, movies, and television shows.
- What do you think of when you hear the words *humble* and *humility*—both good and bad?

KEY IDEA (3 minutes)

Saint Augustine knew that humility is at the very center of the life that knows Jesus. He put it this way: “I wish you to prepare for yourself no other way of seizing and holding the truth than that which has been prepared by Him who, as God, saw the weakness of our goings. In that way the first part is humility; the second, humility; the third, humility.”¹

But what does humility mean? *Humility means holding fast to the reality that Jesus is Lord and I am not. It means living before God, dependent on him, with a listening, teachable heart.*

Humility is on God's heart for us, so we want to find out what he says about it. We'll consider what Jesus says and how he says it, and we'll look to the Spirit to help us understand these things and reflect them in our lives. As you learn about humility and embody it more and more, you will notice a growing gentleness and strength, and others will notice *something* is different.

ARTICLE (5 minutes)

What Humility Is, and What Humility Is Not

Instructions:

- *Read the article aloud, taking turns at the paragraph breaks. If you prefer not to read, say “Pass,” and the next person will begin reading.*
- *Sentences in **boldface** are for the whole group to read aloud together. Awkward? A little. But worth trying as a way to say that you are in this together. Wait until the second meeting before you decide against it.*
- *If anything from the reading stands out to you, circle, underline, or highlight it. If a question occurs to you, jot it down. After the reading, you’ll have an opportunity to share your observations and questions.*

We are starting on a project to grow in humility. Why is it worth our time and effort? The Lord says to us, “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit” (Isaiah 57:15). This means that here on earth, God dwells *only* with the humble. His life and power exist only in the humble. A wise man, under the Spirit’s guidance, said, “The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life” (Proverbs 22:4). No humility, no riches and no honor. This makes humility sound good, if not necessary, but you might also wonder if there are easier ways to riches and honor.

You come to this group with various thoughts about humility. Some are accurate and some less so. As you go through the next several weeks, your view of humility will gradually be refined. The refining process can begin with this foundational truth: If God calls us to humility, and Jesus lived it out, then it is very good.

That doesn’t mean it will be easy. Pride is natural to us; humility is not. We might be tempted to think that we are humble if we are more reserved or less reactive when criticized, but humility is not

a personality style. Whether we are quiet or aggressive by nature, humility is a gift from the Spirit that is learned and practiced.

There is not just one definition of humility, but every definition should include these two basic features: living under God and listening.

First, humility lives under God. You might think that humility is about being a nice, modest person while someone else isn't. But Scripture leads in a different direction. Scripture is first about humility before God. That should be a relief and sound fairly easy. He is God, after all, and you are not. Jesus is now the reigning King. In all ways and at all times, you live under him. That simply means that you live before God—always in his presence—and you walk *with* him. The important thing is that there is no getting away from God. Even when you consider what humility looks like before people, remember that humility is first before God. Everything begins there.

Who is the Lord? He is the triune God—Father, Son, Spirit—who is great and good. We will use those two qualities of God to organize the many things that he reveals about himself. He is the great God over all. *The God formed you*, and the creation belongs to the Creator. Yet his greatness is crammed with his goodness. The Father determined that the Son would die on our behalf, so that the Spirit would bring us close to him, because that is what you do with those that you love. He knew you before you were born, and he loved you. He knew you by name, and he has revealed that he alone is the God of steadfast love. You exist because he wanted you. That is good, and it's humbling. All this has been revealed to us through Jesus, the King.

Now let's make our first attempt to respond as a group:

Jesus, you are great and you are good.

Speaking is a step past mere thinking, and it will keep you awake.

Second, humility listens. As we live under and before God, we are busy worshiping, obeying, honoring, representing, asking questions, and doing much more. *Listening* is the way to coordinate those many

responses. Listening learns from God and always does something in response. You never merely learn a new fact about Christ. You learn and speak, learn and obey, learn and give thanks.

**Humility means that you live before God,
dependent on him, with a listening, teachable heart.**

This will get us started. It means that you hear God's voice over the opinions of other people, over your own contrary desires, over the guilt of your past, and over the voices that humiliate you and pronounce you worthless. Such listening, of course, is decidedly not easy, and the Spirit will help you.

How will you discern God's voice from the competition's?

- His words keep coming back to Jesus—what Jesus says, how he lived, and what he has done for you.
- His words have certain cadences and rhythms. For example, humility is first before God, then before others. Humility is first what you receive from Jesus and then how you respond to him.
- His words sound good, surprisingly good.
- His words invite you to both listen carefully and respond to him.

As you put on humility, you will notice some things and not notice others.

- You will *not* notice *yourself*—at least not as much. You will be more comfortable with your strengths and weaknesses, and less prone to hide your sins and your neediness.
- You will notice that you are able to rest, with less effort given to being self-protective and being “somebody.”
- You will notice people—their stories, their joys, their sorrows.
- You will notice that people are what make life rich, just as God intended.

Humility should *not* feel like humiliation or shame. Humiliation is when you have been disgraced and laid low by another, and

shame is when you believe you really are disgraceful. Humility is walking with the Servant-King for the good of others. In that dependent relationship, we have decisions to make about how to respond to the wickedness and oppression that we and others have experienced. These will not be one-size-fits-all responses, but instead will take into account the particular circumstances. Humility universally takes away our reasons to hide and be silent, and humility resists being defined by the wicked acts done against us.

In short, humility should feel like freedom. You are settled. Not striving. Not hiding. Not defending. Humility yields confidence that what your Father says is true—your past sins are forgiven and far from him, and your regrets and failures cannot nullify his good plans.

DISCUSSION *(15 minutes)*

What stands out or surprises you from this article?

Does it bring up any questions?

Humility means that you live before God, dependent on him, with a listening, teachable heart. That definition has three related parts: You live before God's face, you need him, and your life depends on hearing his words to you and living them out. Imagine one way this could be expressed in daily life.

EXERCISE (20 minutes)

Instructions: Read the verses and answer the questions on your own. Then, discuss as a group what you found.

Below are several verses that appear in the devotion for Day 1. Each verse reflects an aspect of humility. Choose two that stand out to you.

- ☐ “Jesus is Lord.” (Romans 10:9)
- ☐ “Speak [Lord], for your servant is listening.”
(1 Samuel 3:10 NIV)
- ☐ “Every good and perfect gift is from above.”
(James 1:17 NIV)
- ☐ “My soul finds rest in God alone.” (Psalm 62:1 NIV 2008)
- ☐ “He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30)
- ☐ “As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.” (Psalm 40:17)

Why did you choose these two verses?

How does each one guide you toward a humble heart?

Take a few minutes to share which verses you selected and why.

RESPONSIVE READING AND QUESTIONS (15 minutes)

Instructions:

- *Psalm 40 is a useful guide to humility. Read it responsively, with one man reading the words in italics, another reading the regular text, and the entire group reading the **boldface text** together.*
- *As you read, keep these features in mind:*
 - *Jesus is all through the psalm, which follows the pattern of faith: Our hearts turn and see what Jesus has done, and then we respond.*
 - *The psalmist is very open with his private thoughts.*
 - *There is a lot of talking.*
 - *Remember those last words: “I am poor and needy.”*
- *As you read, circle, underline, or highlight things that are important to you.*



The psalm begins: First, you speak about Jesus.

I waited patiently for the LORD;

he inclined to me and heard my cry.

(Jesus always listens and acts.)

He drew me up from the pit of destruction,

out of the miry bog,

and set my feet upon a rock,

making my steps secure.

(Jesus has already secured this in his death and resurrection for you.)

Now Jesus joins in with you. The psalms often have different voices, and it is not unusual for those voices to join in with yours. In this case, Jesus speaks with you in this next section. He speaks from his own experience.

Blessed is the man

who makes the LORD his trust,

who does not turn to the proud,

to those who go astray after a lie!

You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.

**In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.**

(There it is: Humility is being teachable before God; he opens your ears to hear.)

**Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.**

(He wants you to listen, receive, and trust. You do not wait until you have a perfect sacrifice before you come to him.)

*Jesus speaks. The “I” in this section is Jesus talking about himself.
Hear what he says.*

Then I said, “Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.”
I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.

Now you speak.

**As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!
For evils have encompassed me
beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.**

You make your request.

**Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!**

Your request gets big.

But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, **“Great is the LORD!”**

You end with the words of the wise.

**As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!**

“Poor and needy” refers first to your own sins, and then to the injustices done against you, and then to the burdens of life. The first category—your sins—is more serious because they can separate you from God. The sins of other people do not have that power. Psalm 40 pronounces deliverance from both: Your sins are forgiven now; your deliverance is unfolding even now.

QUESTIONS

You were asked to mark what was important to you. What did you mark and why? What are your initial reflections on the psalm?

Author Eugene Peterson says the psalms are expert at “unselfing” us²—they redirect our attention away from ourselves and toward the Lord. How does this psalm lead you into humility and away from pride?

PRAY *(5 minutes)*

Pray together that you would know God as great and good and that you would see yourselves as living your lives under him. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give each of you a teachable heart that listens and responds to God’s Word.

UP AHEAD *(5 minutes)*

This is what is ahead in the coming week:

1. Complete the “Put It Together” section below as soon as you can, while your memory of this time is fresh.
2. If you haven’t already read the introduction to this study guide, go ahead and read it.

3. Between now and the next meeting, read these parts of *The Humility Project for Men* devotional: “Welcome,” and the devotions for Day 1 through Day 7. It is all the better if you can read the devotions aloud with one other person. Speaking is good. Each reading is followed by a response. Please don’t skip that part.
4. Ask one person outside the group to pray for you.
 - Communicate with the person in the next 48 hours.
 - Tell the person about the project in front of you. For example, “Pray for open ears and a heart that is willing to talk.”
 - Send them a text after each of the coming meetings. Include one thing you are learning or one request for prayer.
5. Talk to *someone* about your humility project—a roommate, friend, spouse, child.
6. Be prepared to mention at the next meeting one thing from the devotions that has been important to you. Part of being all ears is wanting to learn from one another.

PUT IT TOGETHER

How would you summarize your time in the project so far? What can you tell others about your humility project?