

SATURATION BIBLE STUDY

APPENDIX NINE

Guided Topic Study

Humility

We will take the nine-step path mentioned in chapter 14 and examine what the Bible says on the topic of humility. Remember, there is no rush. Take your time throughout the study to think, review, and reflect upon the topic.



1. CHOOSE A TOPIC

Humility.

2. PRAY

Before you engage in the Word, ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight, wisdom, and understanding into His Word.

Take the time before every study to:

- Consecrate your heart and mind
- Surrender your life and will
- Ask for wisdom, insight, and grace to understand
- Commit to obey His Word regardless of how difficult it may be
- Declare that you desire to know Him (not just information) and that you long for the Word to sanctify and transform your life so that you might be conformed to the image of Christ
- Ask for His involvement, grace, and enablement not only in the study but to live it out

3. WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW? WHAT ASSUMPTIONS ARE YOU MAKING?

Before we look at what Scripture says about humility, what do you already know? What assumptions do you come to the topic with? Write down everything you can think of about humility and what you remember Scripture saying about it.

4. LOOK IT UP AND WRITE IT DOWN

One of the best ways to start a topic study is to use a concordance to look up words, phrases, and synonyms for your topic.

4A. MAKE A LIST OF VERSES

Go to an online resource like blueletterbible.org and type in words for humility (humility, humble, lowliness, meekness, etc.). Make a list of all the verses you find with the concept of humility.

Because Hebrew and Greek words can have several English translations, it is often helpful to find a key passage in the Old and New Testaments and look up what the Hebrew or Greek word is, how it is translated, and where else in Scripture that word is used.

*For an example of how to do this in blueletterbible, please visit
deeperChristian.com/saturationbook*

4B. READ AND MAKE OBSERVATIONS

Read through the verses you found and make a list of insights, thoughts, and summaries of what you discover. Remember to read the verses in their context (the surrounding passages).

For example, Philippians 2:3–4 says, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” A few simple observations we can make are:

- Nothing in our lives should be done from selfishness or “empty conceit” (also translated as “vainglory” or “trying to impress others”—i.e., pride).
- A key aspect of humility is to regard one another as more important than oneself.
- Another key aspect of humility is to be more interested in the needs of others than my own.

4C. WORD STUDIES

Understanding the topic in its original context is important. Go back and find a few key passages, look up the word, and discover what it means.

To help you work through some of the keywords, here is what one Bible resource says about the different terms used for humility in Scripture:

In the OT, Hebrew ענה (*ʾnh*) carries the basic sense of “to crouch” or “to bend low to the ground”—either to express submissiveness or to metaphorically describe one’s impoverished condition. Some forms of the verb ענה (*ʾnā*) signify being made low or humble by outside forces, while other forms signify humiliating other people. The nouns ענו (*ʾnāw*, “bowed, afflicted, humble”) and ענה (*ʾnāwâ*, “humility”) refer to humble or meek conditions. There is also a related adjective עני (*ʾnî*, “poor, afflicted, humble”), which has a wide range of applications—spiritual, physical, and mental.

Several words in the Greek NT convey the idea of humility or modesty of character. There is a key family of related words: the adjectives ταπεινός (*tapeinos*; “lowly, humble”) and ταπεινόφρων (*tapeinophrōn*; “humble”), the verb ταπεινός (*tapeinoō*; “to humble, lower”), and the nouns ταπεινοφροσύνη (*tapeinophrosynē*; “humility”) and ταπείνωσις (*tapeinōsis*, “humiliation”). Most of these terms may carry spiritual or physical connotations. Additionally, when the Greek word μικρός (*micros*, “small, little”) is used in a spiritual sense, it refers to a state of humility.¹

Do your own word studies on a few of the main words used until you have a good understanding of what humility means, based on the definition and on where it is used in Scripture.

4D. EXAMINE THE OPPOSITE

In studying a topic, it is also helpful to consider examining passages that talk about the opposite of the topic—in our study, it would be pride and selfishness. Do a basic search and write down what the Bible says about pride.

Make sure you examine: Psalm 5:1–12; Proverbs 16:18–19; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Matthew 23:1–36; Luke 18:9–14; Romans 1:18–2:24; 12:9–21; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; 13:1–13; 2 Timothy 3:1–9; Titus 1:5–9; James 3:1–4:17; 1 Peter 5:5–11; 2 Peter 2:4–11 (especially in light of Ezekiel 16:49–50); 1 John 2:15–17.

What do these verses and others you found on pride help you understand our topic of humility?

5. SUMMARIZE CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES

Organize and summarize your study into central concepts and principles. What sub-themes does the Bible give for humility?

For example, you may want to organize your passages and insights based on how the Bible defines humility, how to live it, how Jesus lived and demonstrated humility, the blessings if you are humble, and the warning against those who don't.

However you organize the material, read through and group your insights together so you can see patterns, emphasis, etc. Note: this is easier to do digitally as you can copy and paste your findings into concepts and themes.

Once finished, go back and summarize each of the concepts and sub-themes for quick reference.

For example, as an overarching summary of what I've discovered so far in Scripture, humility is not about personality, quietness, or thinking I have little value. Instead it has more to do with getting my mind off myself. Pride, the opposite of humility, is about self-focus, self-accomplishment, self, self, self. So to walk in humility doesn't mean I lack value (Jesus bought me with a price), but it does mean I stop focusing on myself. I embrace and clothe myself with humility (see 1 Peter 5:5) while allowing the Spirit of God to do a transformative work in my life so that I quit worrying about what others think and be willing to take the lowest place. Humility is about keeping my focus on Christ and seeing myself in light of Him and the standard He has called me to in His Word—in short, I desperately need Jesus and His grace in my life.

6. ASK QUESTIONS AND KEEP WRESTLING

Though we have organized the material, are there any lingering questions you have on humility? Are there any passages of Scripture that appear to challenge or contradict what you are discovering about humility? Search Scripture and wrestle with any questions or tensions and come to a biblical conclusion.

7. CLARIFY AND SIMPLIFY

Define and summarize the topic of humility as simply as possible in a single paragraph (preferably no more than a page).

To take this a step further, consider reducing the summary paragraph into a concise sentence that gives the fundamental concept. How would you explain the topic to someone if you only had one sentence?

8. CHECK

Before you finish, consider exploring the topic of humility in a Bible dictionary or other Bible resource to “check your work” and give additional insights you may have missed. If your understanding of humility is vastly different from the resource, go back and re-examine the topic. If there are slight differences, use the resource to help push back on your study and think it through on another level.

Remember, we are not trying to prove our point or preference. Instead, we desire to know what God's Word says on humility so we can submit our understanding and lives to His truth.

Here are a few helpful insights from resources I examined.

HOLMAN ILLUSTRATED BIBLE DICTIONARY

HUMILITY *The personal quality of being free from arrogance and pride and having an accurate estimate of one's worth.*

Old Testament *The OT connects the quality of humility with Israel's lowly experience as slaves in Egypt—a poor, afflicted, and suffering people (Deut. 26:6). The Hebrew word translated as humility is similar to another Hebrew word meaning “to be afflicted.” In OT thought, humility was closely associated with individuals who were poor and afflicted (2 Sam. 22:28).*

What God desires most is not outward sacrifices but a humble spirit (Ps. 51:17; Mic. 6:8). Such a humble spirit shows itself in several ways: a recognition of one's sinfulness before a holy God (Isa. 6:5), obedience to God (Deut. 8:2), and submission to God (2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 34:27).

The OT promised blessings to those who were humble: wisdom (Prov. 11:2), good tidings (Isa. 61:1), and honor (Prov. 15:33).

The experience of many kings indicated that those who humble themselves before God will be exalted (1 Kings 21:29; 2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 32:26; 33:12–19). Those who do not humble themselves before God will be afflicted (2 Chron. 33:23; 36:12). The pathway to revival is the way of humility (2 Chron. 7:14).

New Testament *Jesus Christ's life provides the best example of what it means to have humility (Matt. 11:29; 1 Cor. 4:21; Phil. 2:1–11). Jesus preached and taught often about the need for humility (Matt. 23:12; Mark 9:35; Luke 14:11; 18:14). He urged those who desired to live by kingdom standards to practice humility (Matt. 18:1; 23:12).*

The person with humility does not look down on others (Matt. 18:4; Luke 14:11). Humility in the NT is closely connected with the quality of gentleness (Matt. 5:5). While God resists those who are proud, He provides grace for the humble (James 4:6). Primary in the NT is the conviction that one who has

humility will not be overly concerned about his or her prestige (Matt. 18:4; 23:12; Rom. 12:16; 2 Cor. 11:7).

Paul believed that quality relationships with other people, especially those who had erred spiritually, hinged on the presence of gentleness or humility (1 Cor. 4:21; Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25). The NT affirms, as does the OT, that God will exalt those who are humble and bring low those who are proud (Luke 1:52; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). The Greek world abhorred the quality of gentleness or humility, but the Christian community believed these qualities were worthy (2 Cor. 10:18; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:2).²

EASTON'S BIBLE DICTIONARY

[Humility is] a prominent Christian grace (Rom. 12:3; 15:17, 18; 1 Cor. 3:5–7; 2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 4:11–13). It is a state of mind well pleasing to God (1 Pet. 3:4); it preserves the soul in tranquillity (Ps. 69:32, 33), and makes us patient under trials (Job 1:22).

Christ has set us an example of humility (Phil. 2:6–8). We should be led thereto by a remembrance of our sins (Lam. 3:39), and by the thought that it is the way to honour (Prov. 16:18), and that the greatest promises are made to the humble (Ps. 147:6; Isa. 57:15; 66:2; 1 Pet. 5:5). It is a “great paradox in Christianity that it makes humility the avenue to glory.”³

ZONDERVAN ILLUSTRATED BIBLE DICTIONARY

The concept of humility shades off in various directions, but the central thought is freedom from pride—lowliness, meekness, modesty, mildness. There is a “false humility” (Col. 2:18, 23; NRSV, “self-abasement”). God humbles people to bring them to obedience (Deut. 8:2). To humble ourselves is a condition of God’s favor (2 Chr. 7:14) and his supreme requirement (Mic. 6:8). God dwells with the humble (Isa. 57:15). Humility is encouraged (Prov. 15:33; 18:12; 22:4). To the Greeks humility was weak and despicable, but Jesus made it the cornerstone of character (Matt. 5:3, 5; 18:4; 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). Jesus by his humility drew people to himself (Matt. 11:28–30; Jn. 13:1–20; Rev. 3:20). PAUL emphasized the humility of Jesus (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:1–11), commanded us to be humble toward one another (Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 13:4–6; Phil. 2:3–4), and spoke of himself as an example (Acts 20:19). PETER exhorted humility before the brethren and before God (1 Pet. 5:5–6).⁴

DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL IMAGERY

The terminology for humility appears nearly a hundred times in the Bible, referencing multiple meanings. Humility reflects godly character (Ps 45:4)—even Jesus was humble (Mt 11:29). It is also associated with wisdom (Prov 11:2; Jas 3:13) and meekness (Job 8:7; Zeph 3:12). Paradoxically, the humble deserve honor (Prov 15:33; 18:12) and the humbled will be exalted (Mt 23:12; also Lk 14:11).

The humble are known for their fear of the Lord (Prov 22:4) and their righteousness (Num 12:3; Zeph 2:3; Acts 20:19; Phil 2:3), but false humility comes from the ungodly, who have no place in heaven (Col 2:18, 23). Believers are commanded to assume humility before everyone (Phil 2:3; Titus 3:2) and especially to humble themselves before God (Ex 10:3; Prov 6:3; Mt 18:4; Jas 4:10). They are even to be clothed with humility (Col 3:12; 1 Pet 5:5). Often humility comes in the form of testing or discipline (Deut 8:2; 1 Kings 11:39).

Humility is always the proper posture before God and others; by contrast, humiliation is never seen as a virtue in Scripture. On the contrary, it is often a punishment brought on by God (Mal 2:9; Lk 13:17) or one's own doing (Prov 25:7; Lk 14:9). Humiliating others is a sin (1 Cor 11:22).⁵

LEXHAM THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK

In both the OT and NT, humility is important for establishing a proper relationship with God, with others, and with oneself (e.g., Prov 22:4; Jas 4:10). The act of bowing low to the ground expresses submissiveness and thus is associated with the virtue of humility. Humility is often listed with righteousness to portray a more complete image of the essential virtues (e.g., Psa 45:4). Humility before God can be expressed through fasting (Lev 23:29).

*The prophet Zechariah presents the coming Messiah King as humble (Zech 9:9; Matt 21:4–5). In the great invitation, Jesus characterizes himself as gentle and humble (*tapeinos*) in order to encourage others to come to him (Matt 11:27–29). Jesus demonstrates his humility by submitting to the Father's will, especially in the garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed that the Father's will be done (e.g., Luke 22:40–46). The ultimate act of humility is Christ's submission to the crucifixion (Phil 2:6–8); his humility serves as an example for every Christian to emulate (Phil 2:1–5).*

Humility as a state of being appears in a variety of ways. Individuals or nations may be humbled or afflicted by God as a punishment for sin (e.g., Deut 8:2; 1 Kgs 8:35) or as an encouragement for spiritual development (Psa 119:71). Humility may involve unfavorable conditions characterized by afflictions (Psa

119:107), poverty (Jas 1:9), or even imprisonment (Judg 16:5–19). Humility therefore has both positive and negative connotations. On one hand, a humble spirit produced by divine action, by one’s initiative, or by another’s action may be a profitable and enriching condition, but on the other hand, consequences that one may experience by oppressive powers, by the sinful actions of others, or by difficult social conditions may be more humiliating than helpful.⁶

9. APPLY

I’ve repeatedly stated that Bible study is not for information but for transformation. When you finish your study, spend time and allow the Holy Spirit to examine your life and reveal any area that needs to change. Don’t merely esteem the Word, be changed by it (see John 17:17).

According to Scripture, can your life be described as “humble”? If not, what needs to change? How can you walk in greater humility today?

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ G. Scott Gleaves, "Humility," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).
- ² Gary Hardin, "Humility," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 792–793.
- ³ M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 340.
- ⁴ Moisés Silva, J. D. Douglas, and Merrill C. Tenney, eds., "Humility," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 632.
- ⁵ Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 407.
- ⁶ G. Scott Gleaves, "Humility," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).