

HUMILITY

LOWLINESS, BEING HUMBLE-MINDED

THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK WORDS used in this study [Optional]

HUMILITY, LOWLINESS AS A CHARACTER QUALITY: The attitude / lifestyle which honors and pleases God.

- Humility a Necessary Part of Our Lives
- The Gospels: The Relationship Between Humility and Exaltation / Greatness
- James and Peter: Our attitude & God's Response
- Our Attitude Toward What Is Humble and Lowly (Including Circumstances, People, Activities, Etc.)
- Jesus and Paul - Our Examples
- A Warning Against False Humility (and being proud of it!)

OTHER TYPES OF "HUMILITY" OR LOWLINESS

- Physical Examples of "Lowliness"
- The "Humility" Of Discouragement and Timidity / Fear
- The Humility of Seeing Unrepentant Sin in Those Who Call Themselves "Christian"

FINAL QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Also included is an article about Proverbs – "**COMMENTS ABOUT THE PROVERBS**" – which is mentioned in one of the sections.

THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK WORDS USED IN THIS STUDY

(Based primarily on Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament)

[This information is optional... you are welcome to skip this page.]

tapeinos

[from the idea of not rising far from the ground]; (metaphoric use): 1) lowly, of low degree; to be brought low with grief, depressed; 2) lowly in spirit, humble. (Also used once in a negative sense, of being timid and unassertive, submissive; contrasted with being bold and courageous: 2 Corinthians 10:1) - Matthew 11:29; Luke 1:52; Romans 12:16; 2 Corinthians 7:6; 10:1; James 1:9; 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

tapeinophrosune

having a humble opinion of one's self; a deep sense of one's (moral) littleness; modesty, humility, lowliness of mind - Acts 20:19; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 2:18, 23; 3:12; 1 Peter 5:5

tapeinophron

humble-minded - having a modest opinion of one's self. 1 Peter 3:8

tapeinoo

to make low, bring low: 1) to make level, reduce to a plain or pass [through a mountain]; 2) (metaph.) To bring into a humble condition, reduce to meaner (=meager, lowly) circumstances: a) to assign a lower rank or place to; to abase; to be ranked below others who are honored or rewarded; b) to humble or abase oneself [by frugal living]; c) to lower, depress [examples: to bring down one's pride, to have a modest opinion of one's self, to behave in an unassuming manner devoid of all haughtiness, to confess and deplore one's spiritual littleness and unworthiness, to submit one's self in a lowly spirit to the power and will of God]. - Matthew 18:4; 23:12; Luke 3:5; 14:11; 18:14; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 12:21; Philippians 2:8; 4:12; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6

tapeinosis

lowness, low estate, humiliation; metaph.: spiritual abasement, leading one to perceive and lament his (moral) littleness and guilt - Luke 1:48; Acts 8:33; Philippians 3:21; James 1:10

NOTE: There is at least one additional Greek word that is occasionally translated "humility" in some translations - a word often translated "gentleness" or "meekness." These references are not included in this study.

HUMILITY - A NECESSARY PART OF OUR LIVES

- **GOD COMMANDS THAT WE HAVE HUMILITY - It is one of several NECESSARY Christian "virtues" or attitudes. [It is NOT to be treated as "optional."]**

Ephesians 4:2

[v.1: You are to live a life worthy of the calling you have received...] ...with all humility (= "being completely humble")

Philippians 2:3

[concerning your actions toward others] You are to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. In humility you are to regard others better than yourselves. [Follow Jesus' example - see vs. 5-11.]

Colossians 3:12

(As people who have been chosen by God, and who are holy and dearly loved by him): clothe yourselves with ... humility [make it a part of your life!]

1 Peter 3:8

All of you: ... be humble. [Most translations; KJV has: be courteous.]

STUDY GUIDE:

- Examine these verses. How necessary is humility? (Or: What does God say about it?) Do these verses treat it as optional?
- Look at the other character qualities listed in these passages. In what ways are they interrelated?
- How important is it to have (or to start to have) these qualities in your life? (If necessary, read the extended context - or the entire epistles - to get a better idea of how these qualities relate to life and to salvation.)
- List some ways in which you can apply these verses to your life and to the way you interact with others. Are there some specific attitudes or actions you need to change?

CHALLENGE:

"Put on," or "Clothe yourself with" humility. (Colossians 3:12) Make it a part of your life - what people see when they look at you. Make it visible in your life - like clothes!

THE GOSPELS:

The Relationship Between Humility and Exaltation / Greatness

1. YOUR ATTITUDE DETERMINES YOUR GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ... EVEN NOW!

Matthew 18:4

Whoever humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. [The text says that he "is," rather than "will someday be," the greatest! See also v. 1-3: Unless you change from one who wants to be greatest (v.1) and become like little children (v.3) (=called humble/lowly, in v.4), you cannot have a place in the kingdom of heaven.]

STUDY GUIDE:

- Study the context of the Matthew 18 passage. In what ways is God's concept of "greatness" different from the world's?
 - Do you desire to serve others, or to be served? What does this passage say about your attitude and your position in the kingdom?
 - If you need to change your attitude and actions, what are some specific things you can begin to do? (Alternate question: Is God doing anything in your life - including testing you - to change you and your attitude? If so, what? How are you going to respond to what God is doing?)
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2. THOSE WHO ARE HUMBLE (NOW) WILL BE EXALTED (IN THE FUTURE)

[Also applies the other way around.]

Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14

Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

STUDY GUIDE:

- Compare the attitude you have toward yourself to the attitude you have toward others. Who do you exalt (treat as more important)? Who do you humble or humiliate (treat as having lesser importance)? What does God say about your attitude? Does he oppose you or favor you?
 - Give some examples of how people often exalt themselves. Do you do any of these things? (If so, what must you do to change?)
 - Give some examples of how people can humble themselves. Do you do any of these things? (If you are weak in this, list some specific things you can do, in order to begin changing your attitude and actions.)
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3. THIS PRINCIPLE SEEN IN AN EXAMPLE: *Mary, The Mother of Jesus.*

Luke 1:48

God regarded (paid special attention to) her humble/lowly circumstances. Result? From that time on all generations would call her blessed (because of the great things God was about to do for her).

Luke 1:52

God has brought down rulers from their thrones. In contrast, he has lifted up the humble/lowly. [This is the general principle; verse 48 shows its application to Mary.]

STUDY GUIDE:

- Look at the principle found in v. 52. How is it similar to the statements examined in the previous section? [Don't forget that this "general principle" does not always get fulfilled NOW (in this present life), but sooner or later it WILL happen.]
- Mary is perhaps the greatest example of the fulfillment of this promise in this present life. Look for some other examples in the Bible, in which this principle was fulfilled. (Two examples to begin with: 1 Samuel 2; the book of Job) Can you find any examples in which fulfillment was delayed - but which will come at the final day of justice? (Note that a similar concept is seen at the end of Hebrews 11. Some received the promise they were looking for before they died; others afterwards.)

JAMES & PETER:

Our attitude & God's Response

PART 1: GOD'S REACTION TO OUR ATTITUDE (OUR HUMILITY OR PRIDE)

- He opposes the one, but he gives grace/favor when the other is present.

James 4:6b; 1 Peter 5:5b

He opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. [quotation of Proverbs 3:34]

STUDY GUIDE:

[NOTE: You may wish to look at the verses in this entire section about JAMES & PETER, before you start answering the questions.]

- God does not always have to use "supernatural intervention" in order to oppose or to give grace. He often uses the circumstances in one's life in order to accomplish his purposes. The principle stated in these verses will reach its ultimate fulfillment at the final day of justice, but even now it can often be seen. Many of the verses in the book of Proverbs (which James and Peter quote from) illustrate this principle, as it applies to the present life.

You may want to glance through some of the Proverbs before you think about the following questions.

- What are some ways that the humble are favored, or receive gracious kindness from God? What are some of the ways the proud are opposed?
 - Taking into consideration your own attitude (pride or humility), as well as the issues mentioned in the book of Proverbs, what is happening to you? Do you have a need to focus on the command found in the next section?
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PART 2: OUR PROPER RESPONSE TO THIS KNOWLEDGE

- It will affect our relationship both with God and with people.

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord.

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand.

1 Peter 5:5

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...

STUDY GUIDE:

- Being under God's "mighty hand" can be comforting or terrifying, depending on whether we are his friend or his enemy! In this instance (in James & Peter), it is so that he can lift / exalt us at the right time (see next section). What does it mean to you, for you to humble yourself before him or under his mighty hand? In other words, what effect will it have on your life and attitude? Are there some specific issues that you need to deal with in your life? (If so, what are they? Deal with them! Don't forget them, like the person mentioned in James 1:22-25!)
 - How can / will you "clothe yourself" with humility toward others? (Focus on specific actions / attitudes you need in your life.) If necessary, reflect on Colossians 3:12 (in the first section of this study), which focuses on the idea of "clothing" one's self with humility.
 - How do the commands in this section reflect the two greatest commands mentioned in Matthew 22:36-40?
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PART 3: WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN WE RESPOND THE PROPER WAY

- We will be lifted-up by God

** If you "lower" yourself, he will "raise" you!

James 4:10

He will lift you up / exalt you.

1 Peter 5:6

He will lift you up in due time.

STUDY GUIDE:

- The phrase "in due time" is very important. This explains why it doesn't always happen when WE want it to. At times, the "due time" may even be in eternity... but it WILL come! What does this teach us about the need for patience and faith / trust?
- What does "lift you up" mean? In what way does God's "lifting us up" contrast with our "lifting ourselves up"?

FINAL QUESTIONS TO THIS SECTION:

- What are some other reasons that we ought to humble ourselves before God? (For example, who is God, compared to us?) Try to find some other verses which describe or illustrate the attitude we ought to have toward God. (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 is a good place to start.)
- There are types of pride and boasting that are acceptable to God. (Read 1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:4, for three examples. See also James 1:9-10, in the next section.) How are these different from the pride mentioned in the verses in this section - the type God condemns?

OPTIONAL: Read the article "Comments About the Proverbs," to explore the way the Proverbs apply to our daily lives. [The article also looks at issues such as injustice - times in which it doesn't appear that these principles are being fulfilled.]

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PROVERBS

As with the rest of Scripture, whatever is written in the book of Proverbs is reliable and trustworthy. More than that, it is authoritative and binding in all of life. Yet being proverbs (inspired and reliable though they are), there are some characteristics which people tend to forget.

Take as an example the fact that proverbs often deal with isolated dimensions of life. In "real life," there are *many* dimensions (not just one) that affect a person's life. As a result, the full impact of the proverb will not always be immediately visible.

Consider a proverb that shows a contrast between two opposing ways of life. Usually, the proverb will describe the one way of life as bringing beneficial consequences, and the other as bringing harmful consequences. Now, these two contrasting results (from the two contrasting ways of life) are accurately described. And if there were two people who were the opposite in this one specific area *yet identical in every other way*, they would receive opposite consequences (at least within the scope of this one area). Yet since so many other factors are involved in life, these contrasting results are not always visible in full force.

Such factors include more than just our own consistent obedience (or disobedience) to other proverbs and teachings found in Scripture. People do not normally live in total isolation from each other. And the sinfulness or righteousness of the community (or nation) in which one lives will also have an influence on the extent to which he experiences God's blessing. There is also the dimension that we could call "temporary inconsistencies." (See Psalm 73 or the book of Job.) All of these factors (which we could perhaps call "environmental factors") must be taken into consideration.

In this life, one will not always be guaranteed that what is mentioned in any specific proverb will occur to the full extent that is stated. The multiplicity of factors that are part of one's life - both controllable and uncontrollable - will prevent this. But the likelihood or probability of such an outcome will increase, within the context of the other factors. The more a person follows the authoritative guidelines of the book of Proverbs, the more likely he will reap the beneficial consequences. The more a person goes *against* them, the more likely he will experience the destructive consequences that are warned against.

There are other items to consider when examining the sayings in Proverbs. For instance, the proverbs themselves have a strong emphasis on one's *present* life. They were written to teach us how to live *now*, not merely how to live someday in the distant future. To be sure, the future aspect of reality (which we call "eternity") is not denied by the Proverbs. It sometimes directly referred to, but it is not the primary emphasis.

A consequence of the emphasis on the "here and now" is that even those who do not know God can experience some of the benefits of following the proverbs! This is due to the graciousness of God, who gives good gifts to both the righteous and the unrighteous. Quite sadly, however, the good benefits are only temporary for such a person (they cease at his death, when he finds himself standing before his judge).

Another issue is that of the "time factor." People often want immediate results. (Where is their concept of "patience," or "perseverance?") The Proverbs (the rest of the Bible, for that matter) do not guarantee instant results for impatient people. (Impatience would more represent the one who does not live according to the Proverbs, than one who does!)

Not all proverbs are promises or show the best way of living. Some are nothing more than observations. They merely describe aspects of life - "the way it is" - whether or not that way is good or worthy of practice. We live in an evil day, and some proverbs merely describe what we should expect in the world around us, or why certain things happen. They are in no way endorsing the evil they describe.

"Temporary inconsistencies" are just that. Even if (in the extreme) they would last a lifetime, they cease at death for the child of God. (Remember that "death" for the Christian is nothing like death for the non-Christian!) As we read in the prophetic sections of the Bible, a wonderful day is coming for those who belong to God! On that day, everything that is in any way related to the presence of sin and evil will be forever removed. And all the "temporary inconsistencies" of life will be gone forever. (In the meantime, however, while such things exist in our lives, we know that they are there for a purpose. And we know that the purpose is good.)

For those who do *not* submit to God and his Word, there are also "temporary inconsistencies." This includes everything that can be called "good" or "pleasant" - the blessings of God. And the same day that the child of God eagerly awaits for will be a day of terror and distress for this group of people. For on that day, the blessings of God will be forever removed.

The blessings of the disciple of Christ are not limited to "physical" blessings. The true Christian is blessed (as it says, in Psalm 1) in *all* he does, under *all* circumstances. There may (and will) be temporary inconsistencies, as far as physical blessings are concerned, but the "spiritual" blessings in Christ cannot be altered by outward circumstances. In fact, even times of persecution can be looked on as a context for receiving the blessings of God! It has been said that it is better to be a Christian under the *worst* of circumstances in life, than to be a non-Christian under the *best* of circumstances in life. To us, the bad is temporary; to them the good is temporary.

The Proverbs of the Bible are not merely "good suggestions" or "antiquated opinions." They do not have the fleeting value of man-made sayings, clichés, or maxims. On the contrary, they are unchangeable and inescapable wisdom. (Man-made sayings have authentic, lasting value only to the extent that they agree with the proverbs of the Bible.)

We cannot "pick and choose" among the Proverbs - accepting some and disregarding others. Remember that the Proverbs found in the Bible are *not* man-made; they have their origin in God. To ignore them is folly. To act as though they were not true is to choose to be a fool.

The Proverbs are life. To disregard them is death.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD WHAT IS HUMBLE AND LOWLY

(Including Circumstances, People, Activities, Etc.)

- Remember that God sees things in a different way than people tend to. We need to change the way WE view things.
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1. BEING RICH AND BEING POOR

James 1:9-10

The brother who is in humble circumstances should take pride in his high position; the one who is rich should take pride in his low position (his "glory" is like that of a wild flower: it is here for a short time... and then passes away)

STUDY GUIDE:

- NOTE: Verse 9 does not have application to the lazy "sluggard," who is dealt with in other passages in Scripture. (See Proverbs 6:6, 9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16.) Part of the reason these people (in James 1:9) are considered as being in such a high position is because of what is said in the James 4 / 1 Peter 5 passages (seen in the previous section).
 - James describes those in humble / low circumstances as being in a high position, but the rich as being in a low position. Why? (Other verses in the book of James may also provide reasons why his description is true.)
 - When you are around the poor / humble, how do you treat them? When you are around the rich, how do you treat them? (James describes how his readers treated those in each category. Read the book and compare their actions to your own!)
 - How often do you view the "glory" of riches as being temporary and passing away? What type of glory do you pursue? (Based on your answer to this question, what does God say about you? Determine whether or not you need to change your perspective.)
 - What are your circumstances? How should you evaluate them in the light of what James says? (Note: Paul was sometimes in humble circumstances and sometimes in "high" circumstances. Look at his attitude in Philippians 4:11-13 - examined in greater detail in the section about contentment, below.)
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2. THE ISSUE OF WHO/WHAT YOU ASSOCIATE WITH

Romans 12:16

You must be willing to associate with the "lowly" - the "nobodies" of the world. (Do not be proud and conceited!) [May also be translated: "Be willing to do menial/lowly tasks" - the types of jobs that those considered "nobodies" (by others) get stuck with (since the others are too proud to do them).]

STUDY GUIDE:

- Are there Christians you are too proud to treat as your equal? Do you have an attitude similar to that mentioned at the beginning of James 2?
 - Are there any expressions of "love toward neighbor" which you do not do, because it involves doing something you consider to be "below your dignity"? (If things do exist, which you are NOT willing to do for others, do you enjoy having others do these same things for YOU? If so, who are you serving / loving?)
 - Does this passage (or others that may express a similar message) require you to change your attitude or actions? If so, what are some specific things you can start with? (Consider also if there is anyone you have sinned against, to whom you must confess your sin and ask for forgiveness.)
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3. THE ISSUE OF CONTENTMENT

Philippians 4:12

Paul knew what it meant to be in need (in humble circumstances). He also knew what it was to have plenty. And he learned to be content regardless of the circumstances.

STUDY GUIDE:

- How was Paul an example in having contentment in all circumstances? Look at 1 Corinthians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 4:8-11; 11:23-29 to see some of the "less than pleasant" circumstances he was sometimes in. What can you learn from his example, that will influence your attitude toward your own circumstances?
- How does the issue of contentment relate to verses such as Romans 8:28 and Philippians 1:6, etc.?
- If you have a problem with discontentment, you may benefit from studying what the Bible says about contentment. Think about the verses you look at and how you can apply them to your own circumstances. (Of course, include verses that do not specifically use the word "contentment.")

JESUS AND PAUL - OUR EXAMPLES

1. JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 11:29

"I am gentle and humble in heart." Jesus tells us to follow him and learn from him. The result? We will find rest for our souls.

Acts 8:33

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice... and killed. [Quote from Isaiah 53:8. Read further and see that, afterwards, he was exalted.]

Philippians 2:8

He humbled himself and became obedient to death... (v. 9: Therefore, God highly exalted him...)

STUDY GUIDE:

- How was Jesus' gentleness and humility evident in his life? How can we learn from him? How can you follow his example?
 - Compare Jesus' humility to the message of 1 Peter (and other passages which deal with the issue of suffering). How should you respond when you are deprived of justice (or when you are in other circumstances in which you are treated in a "low manner")?
 - How do humility and obedience work together? In Philippians 2:8, we see the greatest example of humility. Most of us will probably never be called to go to this "extreme," as part of our humility and obedience. What are some of the "less extreme" ways you can follow Jesus' example of humility and obedience? (Remember that v. 5 says that HIS attitude should be OUR attitude.)
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2. PAUL

Acts 20:19

Paul served the Lord with all humility, with both tears and great trials....

2 Corinthians 11:7

Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians "free of charge." In a sense, he was "lowering" (= "humbling") himself, in order to "elevate" them.

STUDY GUIDE:

- In what ways might tears and trials be a part of humility? What does the Bible say about having a willingness to endure such things?
- How is Paul's preaching (his "lowering" himself to do it) an example of love? How can YOU elevate others?

FINAL QUESTION TO THIS SECTION:

- How do these examples (Jesus and Paul) illustrate the basic principles of humility, as taught in the Bible?

A WARNING AGAINST FALSE HUMILITY

(and being proud of it!)

Colossians 2:18

Do not let those who delight in false humility [and the other "spiritual experiences" he boasts about] disqualify you for the prize [the prize = everything we have been given in Christ - compare with v.9-10a.]

Colossians 2:23

[All the self-imposed practices by which they try to impress others & gain God's favor, including...] their false ("self-made") humility: all these things lack any value in restraining or controlling sensual indulgence. These things may restrain one's activities, but they don't change the HEART! [Contrasted with what we experience in Christ!]

[Note: In the above passages, the word "false" has been added in some translations, because the context implies it. These people are acting "lowly" in an attempt to GAIN "SPIRITUALITY" or favor with God. The humble person the Bible speaks favorably about does NOT attempt to gain favor through lowering himself. He just desires to be honest about himself - about his lowliness before the God of creation (who deserves to be exalted above all else).

STUDY GUIDE:

NOTE: In this section, focus on YOUR OWN humility (or lack of it), rather than trying to evaluate everyone else's humility (whether it is genuine or false)!

- For every good thing, the devil tries to make a counterfeit. As far as humility is concerned, he can attempt to distort genuine humility, or he can provide an imitation where genuine humility does not exist. What are some of the ways in which genuine humility is different from counterfeits and distortions of it?
- How are arrogance, pride and self-exaltation incompatible with genuine humility, but compatible with false humility?
- How can false humility be used to impress others? How can it be used in an attempt to "impress" God? (It won't work, of course!) In contrast, how can genuine humility be used to impress others about God? (In other words, how can it be used to direct other's attention away from you and toward God?)

PHYSICAL EXAMPLES OF "LOWLINESS"

1. MOUNTAINS BEING "MADE LOW"

- This illustrates the basic "physical" meaning of the concept.

Luke 3:5

Every mountain and hill shall be made low ("humiliated"!) [Preparation for the Way of the Lord - Isaiah 40:3-5]

STUDY GUIDE:

- Perhaps a modern equivalent to this would be the turning of a mountain into a parking lot! The "proud" mountain has been lowered until it is flat.
- Study the context. How is this lowering of the mountain appropriate for a symbolic representation of the message of repentance?
- How do repentance and humility go together?
- What must our attitude be before the way will be prepared for our acceptance of the Lord - our receiving of God's salvation?
- [You may also wish to study the prophetic significance of this passage - a quotation from Isaiah 40:3-5. This is not within the scope of the present study.]

2. OUR PRESENT BODIES: "LOWLY" COMPARED TO WHAT THEY ONE DAY WILL BE

Philippians 3:21

[Jesus Christ] will transform our lowly bodies. Results? They will become like his glorious body!

STUDY GUIDE:

- Who does this verse apply to? What does Scripture say concerning those it does NOT apply to?

- When God created mankind, he declared his handiwork "good" (Genesis 1:31). Yet in comparison to the future glories we will experience, our present bodies are like nothing! Scripture does not give us the full details of what we will be like in eternity. (These things will be revealed later - when eternity arrives.) But what it does tell us is sufficient for us to know that it will be wonderful beyond our imagination. What are some of the details Scripture reveals to us? (Some passages to begin with include: 1 Corinthians 15; 1 John 3:2; Romans 8:18+; 2 Corinthians 5:1+)
- Since the message of Philippians 3:21 (and the other passages just mentioned) is true, how should our knowledge of them affect our attitudes and lifestyle? (In case we aren't sure how to answer this question, some of the above passages - and their contexts - mention specific ways it should affect us! See also 2 Peter 3.)

THE "HUMILITY" OF DISCOURAGEMENT AND TIMIDITY / FEAR

1. "DISCOURAGEMENT" - FEELING "LOW": RECEIVING ENCOURAGEMENT BY GOD

2 Corinthians 7:6

God comforts the downcast. Paul's illustration: "He comforted us by the coming of Titus" (and also by the comfort the Corinthians had given Titus).

STUDY GUIDE:

- The word "downcast" is the same as the one translated "humility" in other contexts. Perhaps we can compare it to the expression, "feeling low." What are some of the ways God can comfort / encourage us when we have this type of "humility"?
- In other sections of 2 Corinthians, Paul also makes reference to encouragement and comfort. In ch. 1, he begins by talking about "the God of all comfort," who encourages us in our troubles, and in doing so, enables us to encourage others. In ch. 2, he asks the people to forgive the repentant sinner. In other chapters, he describes some of his circumstances (which could be easily described as "discouraging") as well as his attitude toward them (which is influenced by God's encouragement). Read 2 Corinthians (or at least part of it). Look for: 1) Some of the circumstances which could be considered "discouraging," and 2) some of the reasons for being encouraged when we are in such circumstances.
- Though not the focus of 2 Corinthians 7:6, this type of "humility" (being downcast or discouraged) can also be related to our awareness of our own sins. How can God encourage us when an awareness of our own sinfulness leaves us feeling downcast?

TWO ADDITIONAL THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1) ENCOURAGEMENT MIGHT NOT COME AT THE TIME WE WANT IT TO.

- We tend to focus on our immediate circumstances, but God sees the whole picture. If encouragement does not come when we want it to, how should that influence our attitude toward (and our trust in) God? On the other hand, are there times that he does send encouragement, but we do not accept it because it's not the type we want? (If this is the case, there might be some deeper issues we need to deal with, that are more important for us than escaping our present circumstances.)

2) THIS PASSAGE SHOWS THAT GOD OFTEN USES PEOPLE TO BRING ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS.

- Since this is the case, are there some ways you should be letting God use you to encourage others?

2. IN A "NEGATIVE" SENSE: BEING "TIMID" OR "UNASSERTIVE"

- Perhaps includes the idea of having a "low" level of courage (or none at all)

2 Corinthians 10:1

[False accusation by certain unrepentant Corinthians:] They claimed that Paul was "timid" when face to face with them, but he acted "bold" or courageous when he was away! They were claiming that in his letters he made lots of bold, empty threats, which he would be afraid to carry-out if he were present - that he acted "big" when he was absent, but would prove to be "little" or "nothing" when present. To them, he was like the proverbial dog, whose "bark is worse than his bite."

STUDY GUIDE:

- In Paul's case, this was a false accusation. But how about you? Do you ever make bold, empty threats (or claims) that prove to be meaningless and hollow, when they are more closely examined? Do you ever say that you will do something, and then fail to carry through with your promise? If so, in what ways can you follow Paul's example by NOT having this type of "humility"?
- Some other passages you may want to think about include: Ephesians 4:15, 25 (speaking truthfully); Ephesians 6:19-20 (speaking fearlessly, or with boldness); 2 Timothy 1:7 (not having a spirit of fear or timidity); Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40; Revelation 21:8 (the incompatibility of fear / cowardice with faith / trust in God).
- Note Paul's response in v. 2-6. The word "bold" is the same as the word translated "confidence" or "courage" in 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8; 7:16. Paul would be "bold" in dealing with sin, if it was necessary (v. 6). But he would do things differently than they expected, for they were still thinking about boldness in the world's way! Godly boldness is NOT incompatible with godly humility! Compare the "boldness" they seemed to have toward Paul (expressed by their attitude toward him) to Paul's boldness toward them (expressed in his attitude toward them).

THE HUMILITY OF SEEING UNREPENTANT SIN IN THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES "CHRISTIAN"

2 Corinthians 12:21

Paul was fearful that, when he came to Corinth, he would find that many were unrepentant of sin they had been indulging in. He was fearful that he would have to be humiliated and filled with grief. [Perhaps implying embarrassment that such people would actually call themselves "Christian." Perhaps also an implied question: Were all his efforts at Corinth in vain?]

STUDY GUIDE:

[In Christ, we all belong to each other. The actions of one affects all the rest. In this instance, the Corinthian's lack of repentance would result in sorrow, grief, shame, embarrassment, and discouragement - instead of the joy, gladness and encouragement which should be present.]

- When God changes a person's heart, it has an affect his attitude toward sin - both sin in himself and sin in others. As a result, the presence of sin in someone will tend to have one type of affect on someone who loves God, and a different type of effect on someone who doesn't. What are some of the ways these two types of people will respond differently to the presence of sin in people? [Example: The one may view certain types of sin as inconsequential or even as humorous. The other would see it in a totally different manner.]
- When you see others sin - especially if they claim to be "Christian" - how does that affect you? How might you have reacted differently if God and his Word had not had an affect on you? (If you would not have reacted differently, you may need to examine the reason for this.)
- In what ways can we say this type of humility comes "from God" (rather than from ourselves)?
- Acts 20:19 (mentioned in a previous section) shows that humility is sometimes associated with tears and trials. What similarities might exist between the passage in Acts and the one in 2 Corinthians? What differences?

FINAL QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

- What is humility? How is it present (or absent) in your life? Are there changes you must make?
- Don't get the attitude that you've mastered everything there is to know about humility! In this life, there will always be more to learn - and to apply to your life. The better you understand your own sinfulness and God's holiness, the more you will understand what humility is all about. Think about Paul's attitude at the end of his life (1 Timothy 1:15-17). Today, most people would praise him as a shining example of spirituality and godliness.- many even name church buildings after him! But his own attitude about himself was quite the opposite.
- You will have the opportunity to practice the things you learned. There will be times you fail to respond in the proper way - perhaps many times. The way you respond to your failures will be just as important as whether or not you successfully showed humility. Do not succumb to the discouragement-type humility, and give-up your struggle against sin! Learn from your failures (let God teach you) and go on.