

CHFBC Growth Group Manual

Fall 2012: ver. 3



This manual was designed to help you comprehend the contents of C.J. Mahaney's book, *Humility: True Greatness* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2005) and was inspired by my one of my church history professors, Dr. Michael Haykin from The Andrew Fuller Center at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Pastor Bill

The questions in this study guide are mainly aimed to help you pause, ponder, and think reflectively about the contents of C. J. Mahaney's book. In our Growth Group experience we'll come together to answer our questions but also to reflect thoughtfully on personal application together. When a question relates to a section in Mahaney's book the corresponding page numbers will be bracketed along with it. I encourage you to use your own notebook alongside this study guide in order to write out your answers to questions in full.

Week 1: "The Forward" (9-11); "The Introduction" (13-14); Ch. 1 "The Promise of Humilty" (17-24)

- 1. Why does Joshua Harris believe C.J. Mahaney is well qualified to write this book (9-11)?
- 2. Does Mahaney believe he is qualified to write this book? Why or why not (13-14)?
- 3. Does the world around us appreciate or value humility? What example does Mahaney give to illustrate his answer (17-18)?
- 4. Does God love humility? According to Mahaney, how do we know that humility in a person captures God's gaze (19-21)?

"But [God] gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:
'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble"
(James 4:6; Proverbs 3:34).

5. In the description of the kind of humility God loves, found in Isaiah 66:2, what does it mean to "tremble" at God's word (19)?

- 6. Why is the world's understanding of the virtue of humility severely limited (21-22)?
- 7. How does the quotation by John Calvin (21) help us define the nature of true humility?
- 8. Consult Appendix A and consider the list of possible "humility" stereotypes I came up with. Food for Thought: As you reflect on my three questions and Micah 6:8 how might you explain the difference between perceived humility and actual humility?

"There is a famous story about a man who wrote a book with the title, *Humility and How I Achieved It.* The title is almost as self-contradictory as, in Jesus' world, the phrase 'the good Samartian' would have been. One of the paradoxes of humility is that, unlike the other virtues, those who really possess it usually don't have the slightest idea that they do."

N.T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 202-203.

Week 2: Ch. 2 "The Perils of Pride" (25-36)

- 1. What is the main point Mahaney is seeking to make with his two humourous experiences with cars (25-29)?
- 2. Mahaney draws attention to Isaiah 14 (29-30). In the historical context of Isaiah 14, Isaiah is describing the judgment of God on the earthly human king of Babylon, but in vv.12-15 the language seems to outstrip mere reference to a human king. This has led interpreters to find a prophetic allusion to Satan (or Lucifer, i.e. Day star or bearer of light). Read Isaiah 14:12-15 and list the strongest clues that appear to vault the language from that of human king to that of someone beyond human. What conclusions does Mahaney draw from Isaiah 14?
- 3. Why does God hate pride with such passion (31-32)?
- 4. How does God respond to pride (32-34)? Why?
- 5. Remember the classic illustration of God's opposition to pride in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. After Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, its fulfillment came to pass in Daniel 4:28-37. Read this paragraph including the "moral of the story" in the last sentence (v.37). Can you reflect on (possible) examples of God humbling a proud person so that you can share them with the group?
- 6. Why do you suppose Mahaney takes a whole chapter to discuss pride in a book on humility?

Week 3: Ch. 3 "Greatness Redefined" (39-46) & Ch. 4 "Greatness Demonstrated" (47-59)

- 1. Mahaney points out the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples in Mark 9:33-35 (39-40). How did the disciples' definition of greatness compare with Jesus' redefinition of greatness?
- 2. Mahaney spotlights Mark 10: 43-44 to say, "Jesus does not categorically criticize or forbid the desire and ambition to be great" (43) do you agree? Why or why not?
- 3. Read 1 Peter 5:5. Particularly, notice that Peter uses an imperative verb "to clothe" (*egkomboomai*) and *commands* humility (or lowliness of mind) for all believers. I think this verb that the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to use is highly instructive. Check the Greek dictionary (lexicon) entry in the sidebar and answer the following two questions:

"1463 έγκομβόομαι [egkomboomai]: translates "be clothed with" - a knot or band by which two things are fastened together, to fasten or gird one's self. Additional Information: This was the white scarf or apron of slaves, which was fastened to the belt of the vest and distinguished slaves from freemen, hence in 1 Pet. 5:5, "gird yourselves with humility as your servile garb" means by putting on humility, show your subjection one to another. Also, this refers to the overalls which slaves wore to keep clean while working, an exceedingly humble garment."

The Enhanced Strong's Lexicon (1995).

a) what does this action ("to clothe yourselves") strongly suggest about the nature of humility?, and b) in using this command, could Peter be flashbacking to a significant experience in his past? What unforgettable experience, as a disciple of Jesus, may have contributed to Peter's command to "apron yourselves with humility"? Why?

4. In chapter three, precisely how does Mahaney define the

true greatness of humility? Does his definition capture the essence of Jesus' thought about true greatness? Why or why not?

- 5. In chapter four, Mahaney asserts that this chapter is indispensable to understanding the point of his entire book (47-48). Why is this so? What new emphasis does he introduce and why?
- 6. Why does Mahaney find it significant to pause and observe that in the narrative of Mark 10 Jesus was leading the way for his disciples on their journey (48-50)?

"The cross climaxes the story-line of the Bible – and it's the true climax of the story-line of all our lives as well. The gospel's truth is to saturate our lives just as much as it saturates...all of Scripture."

C.J. Mahaney, Living the Cross-Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing (Oregon, Multnomah Bks., 2006) 30.

7. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a *ransom* for many" (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28). Compare (by looking for similarities and dissimilarities) the way we normally understand the word "ransom" today with the way it was understood in Jesus day (50-56). What is important about the word "ransom" with regard to Christ and us?

8. Mahaney marvels at the lives of the early Christian apostles, James and John, who even through suffering were transformed into humble servants of the gospel and the

church (56-58). With the central theme of this chapter in mind, how would you compare the virtue of humility in the life of a nonchristian like Mahatma Ghandi

and the humility of true greatness in

the lives of Christians?

"The Spirit Does not take his pupils beyond the cross, but ever more deeply into it."

J. Knox Chamblin

"Lest I forget Gethsemane, Lest I forget Thine agony; Lest I forget Thy love for me, Lead me to Calvary."

Jennie Evelyn Hussey

1 Peter 5:5b-6

"Clothe (apron) yourselves, all of you, with humility [as the garb of a servant, so that its covering cannot possibly be stripped from you, with freedom from pride and arrogance] toward one another. For God sets Himself against the proud (the insolent, the overbearing, the disdainful, the presumptuous, the boastful)—[and He opposes, frustrates, and defeats them], but gives grace (favor, blessing) to the humble."

Week 4: Ch. 5 "As Each Day Begins" (63-78) & Ch. 6 "As Each Day Ends" (79-86)

- 1. In chapter 5 Mahaney develops for us a strategic and practical list to fight sin and foster humility. He says to us, "You should have a list" why is it not necessarily legalistic to develop and follow concrete religious habits?
- 2. What is Mahaney's first concrete strategy we can use to fight pride and grow humility (65-68)? Why do you think this step is vital?
- 3. What exactly did Carl Henry's rhetorical question mean: "How can anyone be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?" (see side panel)

Here is Dr. Don Carson interviewing two of America's greatest 20th century evangelical theologians both in their 70s, the late Drs. Carl F. Henry and Kenneth Kantzer:

"Despite your vast influence in many quarters, you do not come across as arrogant. How have you managed that? And do not simply say, 'By the grace of God.' That is true, of course—but I want to know how this grace has worked out in your lives." Both of them sputtered for a bit, and then Carl blurted out, "How can anyone be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?" ... Carl understood, as well as any of us, that the grace that saves us is the grace that sustains us and enables us to bear fruit. From this perspective, we are all, at best, unprofitable servants—even Carl F. H. Henry."

"The SBJT Forum: Testimonies to a Theologian," *Southern Baptist Journal Theology*, 8:4 (Winter, 2004) 84.

- 4. Stop and list, or at least think through, the first ten things you normally do every morning from the very moment you rouse to consciousness in bed. Be specific.
- 5. Do you agree with Mahaney that our first waking moments are decisive for the whole day? (p.
- 68) Why or why not?
- 6. What's the second strategy aimed to set the tone for the day (pp. 68-70)?
- 7. What's the third strategy (pp. 70-73)? Why does it quench pride?
- 8. Why does Mahaney believe that humble people are genuinely care free (74-75)?
- 9. In chapter six, Mahaney calls our attention to an often undervalued time of the day

"When people come up and give me a compliment... I take each remark as if it were a flower. At the end of the day I lift up the bouquet of flowers I have gathered throughout the day and say, 'Here you are, Lord, it is all Yours."

Corrie Ten Boom

(bedtime) and advises us to develop humility by avoiding cosmic plagiarism (79-82). What is cosmic plagiarism, and how can it be avoided?

10. Reflect on your go-to-sleep pattern over the years and particularly your present habit. What are the other ways (besides avoiding cosmic plagiarism) that Mahaney advises us to use bedtime to promote humility (82-86)?

Week 5: Ch. 7 "For Special Focus" (87-96) & Ch. 8 "Identifying Evidences of Grace" (97-110)

- 1. In chapter seven, for the sake of growing in humility, Mahaney presents five more practices he deems worthy of special and extended focus, the first three of which involve personal study. Concerning the first area of recommended study, how does paying special attention to the *incommunicable* attributes of God facilitate growth in humility (perhaps more so than God's communicable attributes) (87-90)?
- 2. Reflect on the pros and cons of the slogan found in appendix B. Is it satisfactory?
- 3. Traditionally, the "doctrines of grace" (unique to Reformed theology) have referred to the biblical teachings that summarize the salvation experience of believers *as purposed by God's sovereign grace*. Explain how the doctrines that Mahaney mentions foster growth in humility (90-91).
- 4. The third area of concentrated study suggested by Mahaney is the doctrine of sin (92-94). Why does he believe that a study of sin, far from tearing us down, will benefit us en route to humility?
- 5. As for playing golf (or tennis or scrabble etc., etc.) and learning to laugh often (94-95), how do these contribute to flushing out pride and furthering humility?

- 6. Concerning chapter eight, reflect carefully: which comes more natural for you, identifying the warts and blemishes in others *or* identifying the evidences of God's grace in others? Why?
- 7. Mahaney rightly describes the church of Corinth as "a piece of work" (98). Scan through 1 Corinthians and build a list of the various problems to which Paul draws attention.
- 8. Despite very real immaturity in the Church of Corinth, why could Paul genuinely begin his first letter to the Corinthians saying, "I always thank God for you..." (1 Corinthians 1:4) (99-100)?
- 9. What advice does Mahaney give for discerning the evidences of grace in other brothers and sisters in Christ (101)?
- 10. Why could Paul, without ignoring the Corinthians' sinful immaturities, remain positive and persevering in searching for evidences of grace rather than dwelling on all their deficiencies (102-103)?
- 11. Mahaney encourages us to motivate other brothers and sisters by identifying the grace of God at work in their lives (e.g. through godly suffering, the fruit of the Spirit, and spiritual gifts see appendix C for a listing of the latter two). Think about those in your Growth Group and come prepared to celebrate God's grace in their lives by sharing with each group member concrete words of encouragement (104-105).
- 12. Why does spotting and pointing out God's grace at work in the lives of others help you mortify pride and cultivate humility (109)?

13. In this chapter, Mahaney is not promoting a positivethinking that frowns on all correction, but with a humilitybased recognition of others in mind, why will correction (when required) be even more effective?

"We mortify pride and cultivate humility by identifying evidences of grace in those around us – evidences that we become aware of only through a divine perspective that recognizes God's active work and calling in their lives and that places full confidence in His faithfulness to complete the work He has begun. Without this perspective, we'll always tend to be critical and pessimistic in our attitude towards others" (109).

Optional: Because C.J. Mahaney helpfully pointed us to three areas of doctrinal study in chapter seven, perhaps it is fitting to mention that our pride is so subtle and deceptive that even doctrine itself, whether we love it or hate it, can tempt us to veer off the path of true greatness (humility) – *check out appendix D*.

Week 6: Ch. 9 "Encouraging Others" (111-122) & Ch. 10 "Inviting and Pursuing Correction" (123-135)

- 1. What four impacts do words have according to Ephesians 4:25, Ephesians 4:26-27, Ephesians 4:29, Ephesians 4:30?
- 2. In Ephesians 4:25 what motivation does Paul provide for his exchange program? Why does this motivation for relational truth-telling make so much sense in the life of the church? If you can bring to mind the feelings you experienced when lied to could you share them with the group?
- 3. In the text of Ephesians 4:26-27 what motivation does Paul provide for cutting out our sinful anger? Why do you think heart-space is yielded to the Devil when we gloss over angry words spoken?
- 4. Concerning Ephesians 4:29 how does Mahaney explain the meaning and impact of "corrupting talk" (112-113)? Explain in your own words what "truly edifying words" are and also what they are not (114-115)? What does the phrase "according to their needs" (NIV) imply about your edifying words (115-116)?
- 5. Do you ever feel weird or pushy when it comes to exhorting another believer? Why? Do we have the responsibility to exhort one another? On what basis, and why (116-117)?

But encourage
one another
daily, as long as
it is called
"Today," so that
none of you may
be hardened by
sin's
deceitfulness.

Heb. 3:13

- 6. In Hebrews 3:13 the main action word is translated "exhort" (NKJV; ESV) or "encourage" (NIV; NASB) from the Greek verb *parakaleō*. If you have access to a Greek dictionary (lexicon) look up the meaning of this verb *parakaleō* and jot down some of the different ways it may be understood (online try one of the following study tools: http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/ or http://www.studylight.org/lex/grk/ and type in "parakaleō"). The variety of meanings for *parakaleō* should suggest some of the ways you can encourage others with your words (Factoid: in the New Testament the noun form for *parakaleō* is used to describe the Holy Spirit; e.g. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).
- 6. According to Ephesians 4:29 what ought to be the motivation or purpose of our words (118-119) and how does this purpose influence the way we speak correction when necessary (119-120)?
- 7. How do you verbally impart grace to a) an angry person, b) an overly self-conscious person, and c) a hypercritical person? And what role do our words of encouragement play in helping *us* grow in humility?
- 8. You may not have an Armani suit and a finely groomed moustache, but perhaps you've had a cream-cheese moment like the man in Mahaney's story (123-124) or like Mahaney himself who was oblivious to his own pride when it was obvious to everyone else (125-127). What is Mahaney illustrating about the nature of pride? What strategy does he recommend to combat this? And on the basis of what two Bible proof-texts?
- 9. Do you agree that your self-perception is as accurate as a carnival mirror? (127) Why or why not?

10. In chapter ten how does Mahaney develop his argument (i.e. what reasons are provided) to prove that the pursuit of humility cannot be a *solitary* endeavour?

CHFBC GROWTH GROUP MANUAL Humility: True Greatness

Week 7: Ch. 11 "Responding Humbly to Trials" (137-154)

- 1. The book of Habakkuk is found in the last section of your Old Testament called the 12 Minor Prophets. They are called "minor" because of their length not because of their unimportance. The prophet Habakkuk wrote in the $7^{\rm th}$ century
- B.C. not long before the mighty Babylonians laid siege and captured Jerusalem. Read the little book of Habakkuk for yourself before reading chapter 11 and evesdrop on a frank exchange between a suffering believer and his God.
- 2. In chapter 1 why is Habakkuk aghast? In other words, what is his first complaint, his first moral problem (Habakkuk 1:1-4)?
- 3. Use your sanctified imagination; how do you suppose Habakkuk might have expected God to solve this problem?
- 4. When the Lord responds and catches Habakkuk off balance, what is His answer to Habakkuk's first moral problem (Habakkuk 1:5-11)?

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered."

(Hebrews 5:7-8)

- 5. In chapter 1 what is Habakkuk's next complaint, his second moral problem (Habakkuk 1:12-17)?
- 6. In chapter 2 the Lord replies to Habakkuk with a blistering denunciation of the sins of both Israel and the Babylonians (Habakkuk 2:2-20); and in chapter 3 Habakkuk's response ends with a commitment to confidence and praise rather than confusion and complaint. What are the reasons behind Habakkuk's change of mind and heart according to Mahaney (139-142)?
- 7. Habakkuk is a positive example of someone who learned to trust the Lord in the face of suffering. According to Mahaney, what three or four specific helps does Habakkuk offer in enabling us to grow in humility (142-148)?
- 8. Tracing the divine perspective of Habakkuk Mahaney takes the risk of sounding unempathetic by saying that "regardless of the severity of suffering we experience in this life, it will always be less than what we have deserved for our sins" (148-149). Do you agree with this, and if so, how might it promote humility in your suffering (contemplate the illustration of Mahaney's sister Sharon) (150-152)?
- 9. What advantage do we have over Habakkuk when it comes to the way we encounter suffering (152-154)? (compare Appendix E)

Week 8: Ch. 12 "A Legacy of Greatness" (155-166)

- 1. Pause and think: In one sentence, and with biblical truth in mind, how would you define the goal of "parenting"?
- 2. Read through the account in Matthew 20:20-28; then, answer these three questions: 1) What was the actual significance of what James and John's Mom asked for (20:21), that is, what was her ambition for her kids?; 2) Why

didn't she know what she was asking for (as Jesus put it)(20:22)? Although Jesus took the disciples aside for a teaching moment in 20:24-28, how would his lesson to



them have applied to James and John's Mom as a parent?

- 3. Mahaney says, "parenting is about preparation" (156-157), and in view of preparing children for a life of humble service, how can a father or mother's love for his or her son or daughter actually become distorted into a respectable but unholy ambition (157-158)?
- 4. What specific things can we do to make sure we pass on a legacy of true greatness to our children? In your own words list the six that Mahaney describes (158-159)(159)(160-161)(161-162)(163-165)(165) and be prepared to discuss them.

Appendix A

Ster·e·o·type [ster-ee-uh-tahyp] *noun*, a set of inaccurate, simplistic generalizations about a group that allows others to categorize them and treat them accordingly.

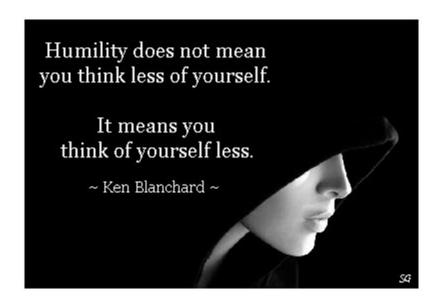
Possible Stereo-types of Humility (Beware of pigeon-holing)

- 1. A hoary-headed Grand-mother
- 2. A Grand-fatherly gray beard
- 3. A spend-thrifty person (especially if wealthy)
- 4. A behind-the-scenes person
- 5. A courteous and deferential person
- 6. A self-effacing and self-deprecating person
- 7. A priest or clergy person
- 8. A reserved and down-to-earth person
- 9. A mild-mannered and soft-spoken person
- 10. A shy and reserved person

Food for Thought: Would it surprise you to know that, biblically speaking, true humility may be wrapped in a flamboyant, expressive, up-front, personality just as it may be wrapped in a more quiet and conservative personality? For instance, could you imagine a confident, colourful, talkative, even dramatic young person who is very humble? On the other hand, isn't it possible for a very quiet, background person who may even struggle with insecurities to be quite selfish and prideful with a sense of false-humility?

When the prophet Micah provides a summary of what it means to please God he boils it all down to three features: to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)

Appendix B



Appendix C

Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23

"...against such things there is no law."



The New Testament Sampling Lists of Spiritual Gifts		
1 Corinthians 12:8-10	1 Corinthians 12:28	1 Corinthians 12:29-30
Message of wisdom Message of knowledge Faith Healings Miraculous powers Prophecy Distinguishing of spirits Tongues Interpreting tongues	Apostles Prophets Teachers Miracles Healings Helps Administration Tongues	Apostles Prophets Teachers Miracles Healings Tongues Interpreting tongues
Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:9-11
Prophesying	Apostles	Hospitality
Serving Teaching	Prophets Evangelists	Speaking Serving
Encouraging Giving Leadership Showing mercy	Pastors Teachers Grammatically these two gifts could also be understood as one (i.e. a pastor-teacher gift).	Verse 11 seems to offer two broad classifications of gifts: those that are verbal or speaking gifts and those that are of the serving variety.

Appendix D

The Pride of Correct Doctrine and the Pride of Anti-Doctrine

"Closely akin to moral pride is doctrinal pride, the assumption that whatever my doctrinal beliefs are, they are correct, and anyone who holds another belief is theologically inferior. Those of us who care about doctrine at all are susceptible to this form of pride. It doesn't matter if we are Arminians or Calvinists, whether we subscribe to Dispensational or Covenant theology, or perhaps have embraced some form of eclectic theology, we tend to think our doctrinal beliefs are the correct ones and look with some disdain on those whose beliefs are different from ours. And then to complete the spectrum of this type of pride, there are those who don't consider doctrine important and so look with disdain on those of us who do. In other words, this form of pride is a pride in our particular belief system, whatever that may be, and an attitude that in our beliefs we are spiritually superior to those who hold other beliefs.

If your Calvinism or Arminianism or dispensationalism, or your view concerning the end times, or your disdain for all doctrinal beliefs causes you to feel doctrinally superior to those who hold other views, then you are probably guilty of the sin of doctrinal pride. I'm not suggesting that we should not seek to know the truths of Scripture and develop doctrinal convictions about what the Scriptures teach; I am saying that we should hold our convictions in humility, realizing that many godly and theologically capable people hold other convictions."

Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colordado Springs: NavPress, 2007) 92-93.

"We know that 'We all possess knowledge.' But knowledge puffs up while love builds up."

(1 Corinthians 8:1b)

Appendix E

Edward Shillito, an English Congregationalist minister, was shattered by the carnage and suffering of World War 1 when an entire generation of young men was mown down by machine guns and artillery in endless trench warfare. But while some would mock God because of such suffering Shillito found real comfort in the Gospel's account of the resurrected Jesus showing his crucifixion scars to his disciples. This inspired him to write his poem "Jesus of the Scars."

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now; Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars; We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow; We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm; In all the universe we have no place. Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm? Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars we claim Thy grace.

If when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near, Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine; We know today what wounds are; have no fear; Show us Thy Scars; we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong, but Thou wast weak; They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne; But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak, And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

[Excerpt from Edward Schillito, "Jesus of the Scars," in James Dalton Morrison, ed., *Masterpieces of Religious Verse* (New York, NY: Harper Bros., 1958) 235]

The point here is that when, like Habakkuk, Christians today are overwhelmed with the perplexity and pain of suffering, *unlike* Habakkuk, there is something unique to hang onto: we know *Jesus Christ crucified*. When there appears to be no other evidence of God's love, we can escape to the cross for "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

FYI: C.J. Mahaney's weblog can be found at http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/blogs/cj-mahaney (accessed on October 1, 2012); also, C.J.'s wife Carolyn and his daughters host a weblog on biblical womanhood called "Girl Talk" at http://www.girltalkhome.com/.