

Church Wide Study
September 6 - October 18, 2020

Dane Ortlund

GENTLE

and

LOWLY

*The Heart of Christ for
Sinners and Sufferers*

STUDY GUIDE

Created by Rev. Dr. Jason Carter



Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Suffers

Dane Ortlund

“This book is written for the discouraged, the frustrated, the weary, the disenchanting, the cynical, the empty. Those running on fumes. Those whose Christian lives feel like constantly running up a descending escalator. Those of us who find ourselves thinking: ‘How could I mess up that bad—again?’ It is for that increasing suspicion that God’s patience with us is wearing thin. For those of us who know God loves us but suspect we have deeply disappointed him. We have told others of the love of Christ yet wonder if—as for us—he harbors mild resentment. Who wonder if we have shipwrecked our lives beyond what can be repaired. Who are convinced we’ve permanently diminished our usefulness to the Lord. Who have been swept off our feet by perplexing pain and are wondering how we can keep living under such numbing darkness.”

-Dane Ortlund

Church-Wide Study Reading Schedule

Week 1: 09/06	Chapters 1-3	17-41
Week 2: 09/13	Chapters 4-6	43-66
Week 3: 09/20	Chapters 7-9	67-94
Week 4: 09/27	Chapters 10-12	95-120
Week 5: 10/04	Chapters 13-15	121-144
Week 6: 10/11	Chapters 16-18	145-170
Week 7: 10/18	Chapters 19-23	171-213

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“The minimum bar to be enfolded into the embrace of Jesus is simply: open yourself up to him. It is all he needs. Indeed, it is the only thing he works with....You don’t need to unburden or collect yourself and then come to Jesus” (pp. 20).

3. We humans are hoarders and collectors of burdens. Our own. To a selfish degree. We are self-centered even in keeping our burdens to ourselves. What a thought! We’d rather keep our burdens to ourselves than share them with another. It’s pride. It’s performance. And both get in the way of relationship.

Keeping our burdens to ourselves is an especially crazy decision and a rather dubious way of living life when Jesus, the Lord of all Creation (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16), has issued an astonishing open-ended invitation to come to him.

Notice what Ortlund observes about Jesus’ expression “my yoke is easy”. Elsewhere in Scripture, the word for “easy” is translated “kind”: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted” (Eph. 4:32). *“Consider what Jesus is saying. A yoke is the heavy crossbar laid on oxen to force them to drag farming equipment through the field. Jesus is using a kind of irony, saying that the yoke laid on his disciples is a nonyoke. For it is a yoke of kindness”* (pp. 22). When we resist the offer for Jesus’ kind yoke, Ortlund insists, we are like a drowning man in the ocean refusing the offer a life preserver. “That’s what we are all like, confessing Christ with our lips but generally avoiding deep fellowship with him, out of a **muted understanding of his heart.**”

What would it mean for your life to lay down your burdens and accept the kindly yoke of Jesus? How would your life begin to look different?

Chapter 2: His Heart in Action

And he had compassion on them. Matthew 14:14

(pp. 25-33)

4. Compassion. Jesus' compassion is his heart in action towards *sinners and sufferers*.

*"This compassion comes in waves over and over again in Christ's ministry, driving him to **heal the sick** ("and he had compassion on them and healed their sick," Matt. 14:14), **feed the hungry** ("I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat," Matt. 15:32), **teach the crowds** ("and he had compassion on them...and he began to teach them many things," Mark 6:34), and **wipe away the tears of the bereaved** ("and he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep,'" Luke 7:13). **The Greek word for "compassion" is the same in all these texts and refers most literally to the bowels or guts of a person – it's an ancient way of referring to what rises up from one's innermost core.** This compassion reflects the deepest heart of Christ." (pp. 26)*

Puritan Richard Sibbes: *"When [Christ] saw the people in misery, his bowels yearned within him; the works of grace and mercy in Christ, they come from his bowels first....whatsoever Christ did... he did it out of love, and grace, and mercy....he did it inwardly from his bowels" (pp. 27).*

What's the point Ortlund and Sibbes and the gospel writers are trying to make with regard to the compassion of Jesus?

5. "The more robust one's felt understanding of the just **wrath** of Christ against all that is evil both around us and within us, the more robust our felt understanding of his **mercy**" (pp. 29).

Do you agree? Why or why not?

6. ***“It is impossible for the affectionate heart of Christ to be overcelebrated, made too much of, exaggerated.*** It cannot be plumbed. But it is easily neglected, forgotten. We draw too little strength from it” (pp. 29).

What does it mean for a believer to remember the affectionate heart of Christ in everyday life? What would that life begin to look like if Christ’s affectionate heart was constantly remembered?

Chapter 3: The Happiness of Christ

For the joy that was set before him... Hebrews 12:2

(pp. 35-41)

7. Christ’s “own joy, comfort, happiness, and glory are increased and enlarged....”

We think that Thomas Goodwin might finish the sentence by saying “when his people glorify him and worship him” or “as he displays his perfect power over creation”.

Yet Goodwin finishes the sentence by writing “...***by his showing grace and mercy, in pardoning, relieving, and comforting his members here on earth.***”

Chapter 4: Able to Sympathize

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. Hebrews 4:15

(pp. 43-50)

1. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. These truths have often given believers a heartfelt sense of help and relief as we live our days with the presence of “a great high priest” in our lives. How is having a “great high priest” meaningful to you? What do you long for Christ to pray for you right now in your life that needs Christ’s prayers?
2. Does anything stand out to you as particularly significant in Orlund’s exposition Hebrews 4:14-16 (on pp. 45-48)?
3. “Our tendency is to feel intuitively that the more difficult life gets, the more alone we are. As we sink further into pain, we sink further into felt isolation. The Bible corrects us. Our pains never outstrips what he himself shares in. We are never alone. That sorrow that feels so isolating, so unique, was endured by him in the past and is now shouldered by him in the present” (pp. 48). Have you ever felt isolated in your pain? What was the cause or situation?

Chapter 6: I Will Never Cast Out

Whoever comes to me I will never cast out. John 6:37

(pp. 59-66)

7. Orlund dissects John 6:32 (*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*) into six distinct and consoling phrases (see p. 60-1). What phrase are you most drawn to and why?

8. Does my great sin discount me from fellowship with Jesus? Do my failings make Jesus run in the other direction? Jesus says: “I will in no wise cast out.” Read aloud (or have someone in the group read aloud) the paragraph in the middle of p. 62 (“But I am a greater sinner...”). What is the emotion that you feel when hearing that?

9. Limitless. You could raise countless reasons as to why Christ should forsake you. But he never will. His patience and long-suffering with you is limitless. Orlund observes, “Every human friend has a limit. If we offend enough, if a relationship gets damaged enough, if we betray enough times, we are cast out. The walls go up. With Christ, our sins and weaknesses are the very resume items that qualify us to approach him” (pp. 64). Jesus is a unique friend. You can never push him away. His heart is always ready to say, “Come to me”, because he is never tired of you. How is Jesus like (and unlike) a friend to you?

10. Is there any further point or idea that came out of chapters 4-6 that particularly sticks with you, that intrigues you, that touches your heart, or that you have a question about?

Chapter 7: What our Sins Evoke

My heart recoils within me. Hosea 11:8

(pp. 67-75)

1. *“Christ is ashamed of me because of my sin.”*
 - Do you think many believers feel this way when they sin?

 - Contrary to being “ashamed of us” in our sin, what is the very different portrait of Christ that Ortlund highlights (see p. 69-70)?

2. God loves the sinner but hates the sin. This mantra has often been heard in evangelical churches. Ortlund pushes the old mantra in a different direction: “[Jesus] sides with you against your sin, not against you because of your sin” (pp. 71). How does this view of Jesus and sin help you live the Christian life?

3. Read Hosea 11:7-9. What do you observe in the text about who God is? Does anything stand out to you about God’s heart from pp. 72-75?

Chapter 8: To the Uttermost

He always lives to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7:25

(pp. 77-85)

4. “It is a consoling thought,’ wrote theologian Louis Berkhof, ‘that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life.’ Our prayer life stinks most of the time.” (pp. 84). What would it mean for you to overhear Christ whispering your name to the Father in praying specifically for you?
5. Read Romans 8:33-34. Our justification (being declared righteous before God because of the completed work of Christ) often seems to “cool” in our heart of hearts. Inevitably, we try to “earn” our righteousness by our faith or our works before God. But Jesus prays for us. Ortlund writes, “**...intercession applies what the atonement accomplished...**The atonement accomplished our salvation; intercession is the moment-by-moment application of that atoning work” (pp. 79). In other words, Christ’s intercession for us is Christ-centered: Christ is wanting us to remember, live, and experience in our ordinary, everyday lives the person & work, the gentleness & power, the victory & fellowship of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

Do you pray for yourself the way Christ prays for you? Why or why not?

6. We are sinners to the uttermost (sin in our lives is comprehensive). But Jesus saves to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25: “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them”). What does it mean that Christ saves comprehensively (pp. 83)?

Chapter 9: An Advocate

*We have an advocate with the Father,
Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1
(pp. 87-94)*

7. Read 1 John 2:1. What is an advocate? And how does Christ's advocacy differ from his intercession?

8. On pp. 89, Ortlund explores the "Who", "When" and "Why" of Christ's advocacy for us (see second through fourth paragraphs). What truth, stemming from these answers to these questions, is most impressive to you?

9. "The fall is manifested not only in our sinning, but in our response to our sinning" (pp. 92). What point do you think Ortlund is trying to make here?

10. When a believer chooses to sin, what happens (see p. 92)? When we cease advocating for ourselves – and instead trust Christ to advocate for us in our sin -- what happens in our lives?

Chapter 10: The Beauty of the Heart of Christ

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Matthew 10:37

(pp. 95-101)

1. “What is it about God’s glory that draws us in and causes us to conquer our sins and makes us radiant people? Is it the sheer size of God, a consideration of the immensity of the universe and thus of the Creator, a sense of God’s transcendent greatness, that pull us toward him? No, Edwards would say; it is the loveliness of his heart” (pp. 97).

“When we come to Christ, we are startled by the beauty of his welcoming heart” (pp. 98).

What about you? What was it about Jesus that first drew you and attracted you to him?

2. If you had the opportunity to preach to young people (1-14 years old) in our church, what are 1-2 things you’d most want to share with them about Jesus?

3. What do you think about this advice from Ortlund? How would you put his advice into practice in everyday life?

*“So let the heart of Jesus be something that is not only gentle toward you but lovely to you. If I may put it this way: **romance** the heart of Jesus. All I mean is, ponder him through his heart. Allow yourself to be allured. Why not build in to your life unhurried quiet, where, among other disciplines, you consider the radiance of who he actually is, what animates him, what his deepest delight is? Why not give your soul room to be reenchanting with Christ time and again?”* (pp. 99)

4. “.if we are parents, what’s our job? That question could be answered with a hundred valid responses. But at the center, our job is to show our kids **that even our best love is a shadow of a greater love.** To put a sharper edge on it: to make the tender heart of Christ irresistible and unforgettable.” (pp. 100). It’s easy to get lost in parenting in the “hundred valid” other things we are called to do! If you are a parent, how hard is this for you? What guides you as you seek to do this in your own family?

Chapter 11: The Emotional Life of Christ

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled,

John 11:33
(pp. 103-112)

5. Compassion fatigue. In our world today, compassion fatigue is a real thing, defined as “indifference to charitable appeals on behalf of those who are suffering, experienced as a result of the frequency or number of such appeals”. Given the great number of people (i.e. the masses) that wanted Jesus to heal them and help them, we might expect that Jesus would have experienced compassion fatigue. Yet that’s not the case when you read the gospels. B.B. Warfield notes that compassion “is the emotion which is most frequently attributed to [Jesus]” and Ortlund observes that “Jesus did not simply operate in deeds of compassion but actually **felt** the inner turmoils and roiling emotions of pity toward the unfortunate” (pp. 106-7).

How amazing is it that Jesus never seems to experience “compassion fatigue” in the gospels? Have you ever experienced compassion fatigue? If we are to have the heart of Jesus, what does the compassion of Jesus mean for our everyday lives?

6. “Fallen emotions not only sinfully overreact; they also sinfully underreact” (pp. 107). What do you think Ortlund means? Have you ever experienced this in your own life?

7. Read Matthew 18:1-6.

Outcry. Today’s “outcry culture” against injustice is often embedded more in rage than rooted in love. Not so for Jesus. What point does Ortlund make in the middle of page 109 when referring to Matthew 18:6?

8. “As you consider those who have wronged you, let Jesus be angry on your behalf. His anger can be trusted. For it is an anger that springs from his compassion for you....In that knowledge, release your debtor and breathe again” (pp. 112). How would this advice help you in life?

Chapter 12: A Tender Friend

...a friend of tax collectors and sinners! Matthew 11:19
(pp. 113-120)

9. Read Revelation 3:17-20. Have you ever thought that Jesus invites the you who is “the wretched you, the pitiable you, the poor you, the blind you and the naked you” to enjoy time with him? To spend time with Jesus over supper? Jesus invites the real you – the “you” that you’d never entrust to others – to fellowship with him. What does it mean for you to see Jesus as a friend and especially a “friend to sinners”?

10. Any other thoughts stand out or stick in your heart from this chapter?

WEEK 5

Chapters 13-15

Chapter 13: Why the Spirit?

*I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Helper.* John 14:16
(pp. 121-126)

1. What does the Holy Spirit actually do? Ortlund lists 11 activities that highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in your life (see pp. 121-122). Which of the 11 activities is most meaningful to you? Read the corresponding verse to the group as we remind each other of the gift and role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
2. An intimate connection. The Holy Spirit intimately connects us to the person and work of Jesus. “The Spirit makes the heart of Christ real to us: not just heard, but seen; not just seen, but felt; not just felt, but enjoyed. The Spirit takes what we read in the Bible and believe on paper about Jesus’s heart and moves it from theory to reality, from doctrine to experience” (pp. 122).
 - i. Read John 16:5-7. What is the advantage of the Spirit’s coming? (pp. 123-4)

ii. Read Galatians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 2:12. What does Ortlund say about the intimate connection between Jesus and the Holy Spirit in these verses (see p. 125)?

Chapter 14: Father of Mercies

...*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort*. 2 Corinthians 1:3
(pp. 127-133)

3. A.W. Tozer's famous quote from *The Knowledge of the Holy* is often quoted: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." What does the quote signify to you? In what ways do you agree (or disagree) with Tozer?

4. Read Romans 5:8-9. On the cross, "God shows his love for us" and we are saved "from the wrath of God". How would you answer the person who says, "I feel like Jesus loves me (this I know) but I'm a bit weary of God the Father. It seems like Jesus had to calm down the wrath of the Father towards me. If this is true, how can God be a good Father?" (see pp. 128)

5. Disposition. Thomas Goodwin uses an important word to describe God as "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3). The word is "disposition". The nature of God's disposition – his character, his nature, his temperament, his essential being – is one of mercy. If you were able to look into the very heart of who God is, you would see "mercy" flowing, so to speak, from the heart

of God throughout all of his veins and manifesting itself in all of his actions. What work needs to take place in the lives of believers for their mental picture of God to move from God the Stern One to God the “Father of mercies”?

Chapter 15: His “Natural” Work and His “Strange” Work

...He does not afflict from his heart. Lamentations 3:3

pp. 135-144

6. Ortlund writes: “Mercy is natural to him. Punishment is unnatural...If you catch me off guard, what will leap out of me before I have time to regain composure will likely be grouchiness. If you catch God off guard, what leaps out most freely is blessing, the impulse to do good. The desire to swallow us up in joy.” How does Ortlund explain the “natural” work of God vs. his “strange work” in the chapter?

7. Read Hosea 11:8-9. What stands out to you in God’s response to his wayward people?

8. Read the Belgic Confession again (top of page 138) with respect to the providence of God. What comfort is the providence of God as believers go through the trails and sufferings of life?

9. What questions or thoughts continue to dog your own mind or heart with regards to the attributes of the wrath and mercy of God?

WEEK 6

Chapters 16-18

Chapter 16: The Lord, the Lord

A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger... Exodus 34:6
(pp. 145-153)

1. When you were a child, did your view of God include the notion that God is “slow to anger”? Why or why not?

“His anger requires provocation; his mercy is pent up, ready to gush forth. We tend to think: divine anger is pent up, spring-loaded; divine mercy is slow to build. It’s just the opposite. Divine mercy is ready to burst forth at the slightest prick” (pp. 148).

2. *Hesed*. This is the Hebrew word for “steadfast love”. Paul Miller in *A Loving Life* writes that *hesed* “combines commitment with sacrifice. *Hesed* is one-way love. Love without an exit strategy. When you love with *hesed* love, you bind yourself to the object of your love, no matter what the response is”. When the Bible talks about God’s *hesed* steadfast love, the Bible is telling you that God binds himself to you – the object of his love. Is this kind of *hesed* love hard to accept from God? Why or why not?
3. Read John 15:12. What would it look like for you to love others with *hesed*-like love the way God loves you?

Chapter 17: His Ways Are Not Our Ways

My thoughts are not your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8

(pp. 155-162)

4. French philosopher Voltaire reportedly quipped, “If God has made man in his image, then we have certainly returned the compliment”. That is, Christianity is often the sad story of humanity domesticating God, making him in our likeness.

i. Read Isaiah 55:8. How does this verse free us from domesticating God? What does it mean that “God is free”, unable to be placed under our thumb?

ii. What do you think John Calvin had in mind when he wrote, “There is nothing that troubles our consciences more...than when we think that God is like ourselves.”

5. How does Ortlund interpret Isaiah 55:6-9 not in terms of “divine providence” (God will be God) but showcasing God’s surprisingly compassionate heart (see pp. 156-158).

Chapter 18: Yearning Bowels

My heart yearns for him. Jeremiah 31:20

(pp. 163-170)

6. How does Ortlund explain the verse “My heart yearns for him” of Jer. 31:20 (see pp. 165-66)?

7. Are you reluctant to see God as a God of such great mercy that mercy most naturally flows out of his bowels, from the place of his inner being? Ortlund writes, “He is open-armed. We stiff arm. Our naturally decaffeinated views of God’s heart might feel right because we’re being stern with ourselves, not letting ourselves off the hook too easily. Such sternness feels appropriately morally serious” (pp. 166). Have you ever **not** let yourself off the hook as a way of reflecting how you think God would treat you? Or been more stern with yourself than God who longs to have mercy over you? Why do you think that’s the case?

8. Thomas Goodwin writes, “The greater the misery is, the more the pity when the party is beloved. Now of all miseries, sin is the greatest” (pp. 167). Ortlund teases out the logic by observing, “then God’s most intense love flows down to us in our sinfulness” since this love of God is “a love that isn’t tied to our loveliness”. How do you react to this news?

Chapter 19: Rich in Mercy

But God, being rich in mercy... Ephesians 2:4
(pp.171-180)

1. How have you experienced, in your own life, the mercy of God? Is there a time in your own life that you were particularly mindful of experiencing the mercy of God?

2. Read Ephesians 2:1-6.
 - Vs. 1-3 – why we need saving: we were spiritually dead
 - Vs. 5-6 – what the saving consisted of: God made us alive
 - Vs. 4 – tells us the why God saved us: that God is not poor in mercy but extremely and extravagantly rich in mercy

Ortlund writes, “Nowhere else in the Bible is God described as rich in anything. The only thing he is called rich in is: mercy. What does this mean?” (pp. 172). What do **you** think it means?

3. This is a chapter that has the power to move us to tears. What moved you the most in this chapter or most caught your attention? Why?

Chapter 20: Our Law-ish Hearts, His Lavish Heart

The Son of God, who loved me... Galatians 2:20
(pp. 181-188)

4. What does it mean to live “**for** the heart of Christ” vs. “**from** the heart of Christ”? Or, to switch metaphors, “**for** a new identity as a son or daughter of God” or “**from** it”? Why does this make all the difference to opening up our lives to the lavish heart of Christ?

Chapter 21: He Loved Us Then; He'll Love us Now

God shows his love for us... Romans 5:8
(pp. 189-195)

5. Many Christians secretly suspect that God graciously forgives their sins *before* coming to Christ but now only begrudgingly does so *after* becoming a Christian:
 - “Many of us tend to believe it is a love infected with disappointment” (pp. 189)
 - “He loves us; but it’s a flustered love” (pp. 190)
 - He looks on us “with paternal affection but slightly raised eyebrows” (pp. 190)
 - How can my creatures still fall so short after all I’ve done for them! This is who we *think* God is.

Yet God “loved us in our mess then. He’ll love us in our mess now” (pp. 194). Why is this so hard to believe and live out?

6. Ortlund counsels you: “When you sin, do a thorough job of repenting. Re-hate sin all over again. Consecrate yourself afresh to the Holy Spirit and his pure ways. But reject the devil’s whisper that God’s tender heart for you has grown a little colder, a little stiffer. He is not flustered by your sinfulness. His deepest disappointment is with your tepid thoughts of his heart” (pp. 194).

Have you ever thought of that before? That his “deepest disappointment is with your tepid thoughts of his heart” and your unwillingness to know that he is rich in mercy and always ready to love you and forgive you even in your constant sin?

Chapter 22: To the End

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

John 13:1

(pp. 197-204)

7. Read John 13:1. “He loved them to the end” stands at the head of a river that winds through many twists and turns and empties out on the cross. What most impresses you about Christ loving you to the end?

Chapter 23: Buried in His Heart Forevermore

...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us. Ephesians 2:7
(pp. 205-213)

8. Read Ephesians 2:4-7. Ortlund writes, “The point of unending eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth is that God ‘might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus’” (pp. 209). This is what God will do for you in the “coming ages”. Ponder the meaning of vs. 7 with your group.

Epilogue

9. Ortlund encourages you to “bask” and “enjoy” the gentle and lowly heart of Jesus in your life:

Go to him. All that means is, open yourself up to him. Let him love you. The Christian life boils down to two steps:

1. Go to Jesus.
2. See #1.

How will you “bask” in all the heartfelt truths in this book?



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