

Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers by Dane Ortlund

Discussion Guide

Following here is a combination of questions and quotes. This guide has been developed for small group discussion but can also be used for individual journaling.

Introduction

"It is one thing to know the doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement and a hundred other vital doctrines. It is another, more searching matter to know his heart for you" (p. 16).

If you tried to introduce Jesus to someone who doesn't know Him, how would you describe Him?

Chapter 1: His Very Heart

Key Verse: [Matthew 11:29](#) "I am gentle and lowly of heart."

"Meek. Humble. Gentle. Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe" (p. 19).

What is life like for the Christian who thinks they are on some performance treadmill? What happens when you think that Jesus is easily impatient with us?

Jesus described himself as lowly or socially unimpressive. How does His birth story cast light on who He is and who He would pursue?

"You don't have to unburden or collect yourself and then come to Jesus. Your very burden is what qualifies you to come. No payment is required: He says 'I will give you rest.' His rest is gift, not transaction" (pp. 20-21).

"His yoke is kind and his burden is light. That is, his yoke is a non-yoke, and his burden is a non-burden. What helium does to a balloon, Jesus' yoke does to his followers. We are buoyed along in life by his endless gentleness and supremely accessible lowliness" (p. 23).

How do other religions describe their gods? How is Jesus' description of Himself antithetical to those deities?

How does Jesus' description of Himself bring comfort? Challenge your own perceptions of Him?

In what ways does the gentleness and the lowliness of Jesus invite us into knowing Him more?

Chapter 2: His Heart in Action

Key Verse: Matthew 14:14, "And he had compassion on them."

This chapter begins with reminders of broken, wounded, socially unacceptable people Jesus touched. Which of these moments in the life of Christ are particularly comforting to you? Why is that?

"The dominant note left ringing in our ears after reading the Gospels, the most vivid and arresting element of the portrait, is the way the Holy Son of God moves toward, touches, heals, embraces, and forgives those who least deserve it yet truly desire it" (p. 27).

What are some areas of your life that you consider too broken for Jesus to touch, to forgive?

The book talks about our tendency to be drawn to only part of the character of Jesus, drawn to his grace for example, to the exclusion of his Justice. Reread page 28. In what direction to you see yourself leaning? How does that impact your view of the whole truth about who Jesus is?

"Thomas Goodwin said, 'Christ is love covered over in flesh.' Picture it. . .If compassion clothed itself in a human body and went walking around this earth, what would it look like? We don't have to wonder" (p. 32).

If Jesus walked among us today, who are some of the morally or physically repulsive people you would find Him reaching out to? Where would you be in the crowds? At His feet or watching Him askance?

Chapter 3: The Happiness of Christ

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

"Jesus doesn't want us to draw on his grace and mercy only because it vindicates his atoning work. He wants us to draw on his grace and mercy because it is who he is. . . Christ gets more joy and comfort than we do when we come to him for help and mercy" p. 37.

What is the first characteristic that comes to mind when you think of God's attributes? Have you focused on some aspects of who He is to the exclusion of others?

Do you think about Jesus' comfort when you come to Him with your sin? Why? How can you be sure? What verses (outside of Hebrew) come to mind?

In what ways do you find yourself willing to sin because of Jesus' payment for your sins?

Chapter 4: Able to Sympathize

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

"All of our natural intuitions tell us that Jesus is with us, on our side, present and helping, when life is going well. This text says the opposite. It is in "our weaknesses" that Jesus sympathizes with us" p. 46.

What struggle in your own life comes to mind when you think of Jesus' "co-suffering?" What comfort comes from Jesus' being tested in similar ways that you are?

How does the name "Immanuel" echo in Jesus solidarity with our weakness?

"The key to understanding the significance of Hebrews 4:15 is to push equally hard on the two phrases "in every respect" and "yet without sin." . . . He had no sin. He was "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners" (Heb 7:26-27). . . . That enticing temptation, that sore trial, that bewildering perplexity--he has been there. Indeed, his utter purity suggests that he has felt these pains more acutely than we sinners every could" p. 47-48.

Chapter 5: He Can Deal Gently

Key Verse: Hebrew 5:2. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.

What does it mean that Jesus deals gently with his people?

With whom does Jesus deal gently? In what ways do you understand yourself to be ignorant and wayward?

"Consider what all this means. When we sin, we are encouraged to bring our mess to Jesus because he will know just how to receive us. He doesn't handle us roughly. He doesn't scowl and scold. He doesn't lash out. . . ." p. 54

How does the gentleness of Jesus impact your struggle with your sin?

"Looking inside ourselves, we can anticipate only harshness from heaven. Looking out to Christ, we can anticipate only gentleness" p. 57.

Chapter 6: I will never cast out.

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

What fears plague you about coming to Jesus? How do those fears demonstrate a misunderstanding of His invitation to come?

Think on the phrase used in the KJV: “I will in no wise cast out.” Examine Bunyan’s list of objections on page 61. With which one(s) do you most identify?

Read the following verses. How does each text hammer home Jesus’ gentle invitation and care?

- [Romans 2:3](#): “...do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that **God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?**”
- [Ephesians 2.4-7](#) “but^[c] God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages **he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness** toward us in Christ Jesus.
- [Titus 3.4](#) “...**when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,** by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace **we might become heirs** according to the hope of eternal life

In light of the “in no wise cast out” welcome of Jesus, spend some time thanking Him for his steadfast lovingkindness to you.

Chapter 7: What our Sins Evoke

Key Verse: My heart recoils within me. Hosea 11.8

“You will never make yourself feel like you are a sinner. . . We are all on very good terms with ourselves, and we can always put up a good case for ourselves. Even if we try to make ourselves feel that we are all sinners, we will never do it. There is only one way to know we are sinners, and that is to have some dim, glimmering conception of God” Martyn Lloyd-Jones pp. 67-68.

When do you most feel the weight of your sin? How does your knowledge of God's holiness add weight to your understanding of that sin?

“And just as we can hardly fathom the divine ferocity awaiting those out of Christ, it is equally true that we can hardly fathom the divine tenderness already resting now on those in Christ” p. 68.

How does the holiness of Christ move Him to pity the sin of those who are in Christ?

Consider the [Prodigal Son](#) (or is it the Prodigal Father?). How does Jesus' story give us insight into His love in the midst of our sin?

“The sins of those who belong to God open the floodgates of his heart of compassion for us. The dam breaks. It is not our loveliness that wins His love. It is our unloveliness” p. 75

How does God's full responsibility for our salvation bring Him full glory?

Chapter 8: To the Uttermost

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

What is intercession? In general terms it means that a third party comes between two others and makes a case to one on behalf of the other. . . Christ's present heavenly intercession on our behalf is a reflection of the fullness and victory and completeness of his earthly work, not a reflection of anything lacking in his heavenly work” p. 79.

What adjectives and adverbs does Dane use in this chapter to describe Jesus' intercession for us? How do these words describe the fullness of Jesus heart? (see page 80).

Think about those sins in your life that you have difficulty believing God truly has forgiven. How does Hebrews 7:25 describe Christ loving us more in those "crevices"?

Take some time to read through [Romans 8](#). How could the intercession of Christ impact our own time of prayer to our God?

“Our sinning goes to the uttermost. But his saving goes to the uttermost. And his saving always outpaces and overwhelms our sinning, because he always lives to intercede for us” p. 85.

Chapter 9: An Advocate

Key Verse: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." 1 John 2:1

What is the difference between "advocate" and "intercessor"?

“We need not only exhortation but liberation. We need not only Christ as king but Christ as friend. Not only over us but next to us” p. 88.

Discuss the first paragraph on p. 91. What does Dane mean by "sometimes we sin big sins"?

Jesus is both Judge and Advocate. How can this truth cause us to depend on him with greater trust?

Chapter 10: The Beauty of the Heart of Christ

Key verse: "Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:17

What did Jonathan Edwards believe about a child's capacity for understanding the Gospel?

How does beauty pull us toward the love of Christ and why?

How have you been startled by the beauty of Jesus' welcoming heart?

“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. . .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 time again?” p. 99

Chapter 11: The Emotional Life of Christ

Key verse: John 11:33 "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."

When was the last time that you judged yourself or someone else to be "emotional"? How did sin play into those emotions (or that judgement)?

“Emotions are not themselves a result of the fall. Jesus experienced the full range of emotions that we do (Heb 2:17; 4:15) As Calvin put it, "The Son of God having clothed himself with our

flesh, of his own accord clothed himself also with human feelings, so that he did not differ at all from his brethren, sin only excepted." p. 104

When you think of Jesus' emotions, what story from His life comes most readily to mind?

"Jesus felt. Perfect unfiltered compassion. What must that have been like? Rising up within him? What would perfect pity look like, mediated not through a prophetic oracle as in the Old Testament but through an actual, real human. And what if that human were still a human, though now in heaven, and looked at each of us spiritual lepers with unfiltered compassion, an outflowing affection not limited by the sinful self-absorption that restricts our own compassion." p. 107

BB Warfield said of Jesus that "compassion and indignation rise together in his soul." When have you seen that *your* "righteous" indignation is tainted by your sin? How are Jesus' emotions different than yours?

Read through the second paragraph of the Warfield quote on page 111. How does Jesus' righteous wrath bring you confidence of his compassion?

Chapter 12: A Tender Friend

Key Verse: Matthew 11:19 "...a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

What are some of the first things that come to mind when you think about human friendship?

Matthew and Luke both recorded Jesus as He quoted the religious leaders calling Him a "friend of tax collectors and sinners." How do these Apostles' backgrounds add to your understanding of this phrase?

"He is come down from heaven and has taken upon him the human nature in purpose, that he might be near to you and might be, as it were, your companion." Jonathan Edwards p. 118

How do you read the words, "sheer companionship" on page 118? What does the companionship of Christ look like? What does his friendship look like on your journey?

What are some Old Testament examples of God's friendship with His people?

Spend some time thanking Jesus for His consistent, perfect friendship.

Chapter 13: Why the Spirit?

Key Verse: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper." John 14:16

What do you know about the Holy Spirit? In what ways has your church emphasized or downplayed the ministry of the Holy Spirit?

Look at the list of descriptions of the role of the Holy Spirit starting on page 121. Which role had you not previously considered?

The Spirit's role, in summary, is to turn our postcard apprehensions of Christ's great heart of longing affection for us into an experience of sitting on the beach, in a lawn chair, drink in hand, enjoying the actual experience. p 126.

Take a few moments to thank God for sending the Holy Spirit to cause us to know more clearly the love of Christ. The hymn "Holy Spirit Living Breath of God" by the Gettys may be of assistance to you as you meditate on His work.

Chapter 14: Father of Mercies

Key Verse: ". . . the Father of mercies and God of all comfort." 2 Corinthians 1:3

How do you think about God the Father? If you had to pick one vignette from the Bible to describe your understanding of who He is, which would you choose?

"Notice the way Goodwin helps us to see that the label "Father of mercies" is the Bible's way of taking us into the deepest recesses of who God the Father is. A correct understanding of the triune God is not that of a Father whose central disposition is judgement and a Son whose central disposition is love. The heart of both is one and the same; this is, after all, one God, not two. Theirs is a heart of redeeming love, not compromising justice and wrath but beautifully satisfying justice and wrath." p. 131

What are some ways you have suspected that God the Father has withheld His tenderness from you? How has this chapter made you reconsider this?

Chapter 15: His "Natural" Work and His "Strange" Work

Key Verse: "He does not afflict from his heart." Lamentations 3:33

(For small groups: Read the book of Lamentations before gathering.)

How does Jesus "provide new sharpness to who God is"?

The book of Lamentations explores God as "the one who rules and ordains all things" and who "brings affliction into our lives with a certain divine reluctance." Read the book of Lamentations. How is God's governance and mercy on display throughout the book?

Why does Goodwin use the term "strange work" to describe God's justice?

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. This is why Goodwin can say of God that "all his attributes seem but to set out his love." p. 141

For more exploration of the topic of the doctrine of God, listen to [The Mission Podcast with James Dolezal](#).

Chapter 16: The Lord, the Lord

Key Verse: "A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger. . ." Exodus 34:6

Read Exodus 24:6-7 slowly and out loud.

Moses asked God to see His glory. If you had been in Moses' shoes, what would you have expected to see? How does God define his glory? How does that self-description surprise you?

"His highest priority and deepest delight and first reaction--his heart--is merciful and gracious. He gently accommodates himself to our terms rather than overwhelming us with his." p. 148

Read [Matthew 17:1-13](#). How does Jesus fulfill Moses' request during his time on earth? The musical artist and serious Bible student Michael Card [reflected on the Transfiguration](#) with these words: "Moses finally saw the face that before he'd hidden from."

How have these passages shown you ways that you have misunderstood what you have previously seen of God's character?

Chapter 17: His Ways are Not Our Ways

Key Verse: "My thoughts are not your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8

As we continue to explore the question of our expectations of who God is and how He might act, what are some ways this chapter has brought to light our faulty understanding of God?

"God's ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts in that his are thoughts of loves and ways of compassion that stretch to a degree beyond our mental horizon." p. 158

Begin to list the ways that God is not like you.

In what ways are you astounded by God's heart of compassion?

Chapter 18: Yearning Bowels

Key Verse: My heart yearns for him. Jeremiah 31:20

"The Bible takes us by the hand and leads us out from under the feeling that his heart for us wavers according to our loveliness. God's heart confounds our intuitions of who he is." p. 167

What are some ways that you have seen the intensity of God's love flow to you?

How is the world "starving for a yearning love"?

Spend some time in prayer confessing your small thoughts of God. Ask God for greater understanding, faith and wisdom. Rejoice that He has promised these for those He loves.

Chapter 19: Rich in Mercy

Key Verse: "But God, being rich in mercy. . ." Ephesians 2:4

What do you normally think of when you hear the word "lavish." Read Ephesians 1:3-10. What does it mean that God has lavished His grace on us? How does that relate to His wealth of mercy?

Divine love is not forbearance or longsuffering or patience. . . p. 174

Are there times when you think that God is impatient with your sin? How does a flood of mercy sweep that expectation away?

Christ was sent not to mend wounded people or wake sleepy people or advise confused people or inspire bored people or spur on lazy people or educate ignorant people, but to raise dead people. p. 175.

As you read this chapter, what are some of your impoverished views of God's mercy that were exposed?

Chapter 20: Our Lawish Hearts, His Lavish Heart.

Key Verse: "The Son of God, who loved me. . ." Galatians 2:20

What is the difference between living for God or living *from* Him?

The battle of the Christian life is to bring your own heart into alignment with Christ's, that is, getting up each morning and replacing your natural orphan mind-set with a mind-set of full and free adoption into the family of God through the work of Christ your older brother, who loved you and gave himself for you out of the overflowing fullness of His gracious heart. p. 181

As you read the description of the boy's activities on page 182, how did you begin to see your own orphan-behavior in response to God?

Dane uses one of my favorite quotes from [one of my favorite dead friends, John Newton](#): "Our sins are many, but His mercies are more; our sins are great, but His righteousness is greater; we are weak, but He is power" (p. 183) How do we devalue God's gifts of mercy, righteousness, and strength when we attempt to earn them through our law-ish attempts?

In what ways does it feel natural to attempt to work for our acceptance in the family of God? How is our understanding of our identity in Christ skewed?

What are we saying when we identify ourselves by our particular sin? How does true alignment of our reality swimming in Christ's mercy challenge us to move away from that sin toward our true identity?

If God's mercy is found in the ministry of Jesus, how do we see the richness of that mercy worked out? What incident in Jesus' life comes to mind? How does that mercy work out in your own life?

Chapter 21: He Loved Us Then; He'll love us now

Key Verse: "God shows His love for us. . ." Romans 5:8

Read Romans 5:6-11. What are the descriptors of our state before we received reconciliation through Jesus?

God wasn't waiting to see if we would turn out to be good followers. While we were weak, ungodly sinners, enemies under His wrath, He loved us. How does God's heart of mercy give you security today because of that past work?

He loved us in our mess then. He'll love us in our mess now. p. 194

Read Romans 8:31-39. Rejoice. Savor the concept of nothing separating you from God's love.

Those in Christ are eternally imprisoned within the tender heart of God. We will be less sinful in the next life than we are now, but we will not be any more secure in the next life than we are now. p. 195

Chapter 22: To the End

Key Verse: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." John 13:1

What did B. B. Warefield mean (p.200) when he said that Jesus "*died not of the cross, but, as we commonly say of a broken heart*"?

Think back to a time when you felt utterly rejected. How can that pain help us to think more clearly about the cross and what Jesus experienced?

How is the cross proof that Jesus set His heart to love us?

Chapter 23: Buried in His Heart Forever More

Key Verse: ". . .so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us." Ephesians 2:7

How would you describe your purpose for existence? Reread the summary for Jonathan Edwards:

The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse, toward whom he might fully exercise the infinite benevolence of his nature, and to whom he might, as it were, open and pour forth all that immense foundation of condescension, love, and grace that was in his heart, and that in this way God might be glorified? p. 206

How do you think about heaven? How would you describe it to someone who had never heard of it before?

What did Jonathan Edwards mean when he said that those were Jesus' saints would "*swim in the ocean of love, and be eternally swallowed up in the infinitely bright, and infinitely mild and sweet beams of divine love*"? (p. 208)

As he closed this chapter, Dane reflected on the transformation of all our brokenness "that will one day be rewound and reversed. Take a few moments to listen to the song [Advent Gloria](#) by Ryan Foglesong, Jeff Althoff, and Grace Nixon. The second verse contains the line: "*All of our sadness here will come untrue when he returns in power to raise us.*" Meditate on the resurrection power of Jesus in our lives. How do these sure realities impact our daily lives?

Epilogue

Jesus' invitation was simple: "Come to me." Rest well, friends.