

Gentle & Lowly

Hebron Church Reflection Guide



Dear Reader,

I am so excited that you are joining us in our Summer reading of Gentle & Lowly. My prayer is that these next few weeks will be a time of incredible spiritual growth for you as you see and savor our great Savior.

Gentle & Lowly was released in early 2020 and has already sold well over a million copies. While we believe that no book outside of the Bible is perfect and free from any error, we have seen how God has used the truth of this book to stir hearts in affection for Jesus as we realize the extent of his love for his children.

This reflection guide is designed to accompany an 8 week reading of Gentle & Lowly. After you have read the chapters for each week, then this guide will emphasize some of the valuable insights from the book and ask some questions for reflection. This guide is designed for use by individuals or groups who want to read the book together.

I hope that this book will mean as much to you as it has meant to me over the last year. Whether you are a young Christian or have walked with Jesus for decades, it is so easy for our hearts to paint a picture of Jesus that comes from our feelings rather than what his Word tells us is true. This book is designed to recalibrate our hearts to the truth of who Jesus is and the depths of his love for his children.

Happy reading!

Chet Harvey
Associate Pastor of Adult Discipleship

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Week 1

Chapters 1-3: Christ's Heart and Happiness

Sink In

In the opening chapter, Dane Ortlund points out that there is one single verse in all of Scripture that describes Jesus' heart: *I am gentle and lowly in heart...* Of all the things that we could know about our Savior's heart, this is what God chose to reveal to us. As Ortlund notes, the word *gentle* here refers to someone who has a low estate in life, and the word *lowly* refers to someone who is accessible. Our Savior made himself of low estate and accessible to us, coming near to us in the incarnation.

Our skewed intuitions often tell us that God is not gentle and loving toward us, but harbors resentment or anger. As Ortlund says, we can all too easily picture Jesus as coming close, but holding his nose. In order to embrace that Jesus longs to be near us, we have to rely on what God's Word actually tells us about him, rather than on our personal feelings. On page 24, Ortlund writes, "This is why we need a Bible. Our natural intuition can only give us a God like us. The God revealed in Scripture deconstructs our intuitive predilections and startles us with one whose infinitude of perfections is matched by his

infinitude of gentleness.” Our infinite God is infinitely gentle!

Of course, another extreme is to view Jesus apart from the wrath testified in the Bible. How do we understand both his mercy and wrath? As Ortlund will show throughout the book, God indeed displays wrath toward sin, but the heart of Jesus is most naturally driven by affection.

In order to understand Christ’s heart toward sinners, we must understand his happiness within himself. Our God is a God of infinite joy within his being. The Trinity exists in eternal joy. As Ortlund writes, when we come to Christ for forgiveness, we are laying hold of his own great joy, which is his natural state within himself. Jesus is a fountain of joy!

Reflect

1. What stood out the most for you in these chapters?
2. Are you ever tempted to believe that Christ doesn’t have a gentle heart toward you? What causes these feelings?
3. When you think of Christ, do you tend to think of him as loving or frustrated with you?
4. How can you lay hold of the truth of Christ’s heart toward you?

Week 2

Chapters 4-6: Christ's Heart Toward Sinners

Sink In

In chapter 4, Ortlund wants us to think about Christ's sympathy toward sinners in their sins. Hebrews 4:16 tells us that Christ is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. As Ortlund writes, the word *sympathize* here means solidarity with, or one who suffers alongside. I like the way that Ortlund puts it: the writer of Hebrews is showing Christ's *witnness* toward us. He doesn't love us from far away, but as one who walks alongside us even in the midst of our sin.

Once again, the Bible confronts our feelings when we often feel most alone in our sin. In spite of what our feelings tell us, the truth that we can stand on is that if we are believers in Christ, then he is nearer to us than a brother in the middle of our struggles. And not only is he with us, he deals gently with us in our sin! Hebrews 5:2 tells us that Christ deals gently with ignorant and wayward people. As Ortlund writes, this expression encapsulates every single sin and sinner. There is no sin that a believer can commit that will make Christ move away from them. On page 55, Ortlund writes, "Rather than dispensing grace to us from on high, he gets down with us, he

puts his arm around us, he deals with us in the way that is just what we need. He deals gently with us.”

The Savior who deals gently with his child will never cast that child from his presence. If you have made Jesus your Savior, then he will always be your Savior. Ortlund writes this incredible truth: “In order for you to fall short of loving embrace into the heart of Christ both now and into eternity, Christ himself would have to be pulled down out of heaven and put back in the grave.” Christ’s death and resurrection accomplished his desire to be near to you for all eternity. Your sin cannot separate you from what Christ has accomplished!

Reflect

1. What are some quotes or ideas that stood out to you in these chapters?
2. Are you tempted to believe that your sin causes separation between you and Christ? Why do you believe this?
3. What did you learn about Christ’s sympathy toward believers in these chapters?
4. What did you learn about Christ’s heart toward you in these chapters?

Week 3

Chapters 7-9: Christ's Action Toward Sinners

Sink In

In chapter 7, Dane Ortlund writes of what happens when we sin. In particular, he wants us to see how God's grace is evoked towards us in the midst of our sin. One really important concept that he lays out is that grace is not a thing that God merits towards believers, but is Jesus himself. When we talk about God's grace toward sinners, we are talking about Jesus. This is an important idea, because it means that when you have been given Jesus through repentance and faith, he is always on your side. In Ortlund's simple words: "He hates sin. But he loves you." As Christians, we will never be under the threat of God's wrath because we have Christ himself with us.

And not only is Christ with us, he is in heaven interceding for us. Hebrews 7:25 shows us how Christ's heart is working for the good of his people today. He is on our side even in his heavenly reign. As Ortlund notes, this does not mean that the Father is against us or needs to be talked into accepting us. Rather, the Father delights in saying 'Yes' to those for whom the Son intercedes.

Along with being with us and interceding for us, Jesus is also advocating for us. As Ortlund writes in chapter 9, advocacy is similar to intercession but a bit different. While intercession is something that Christ does for us in general, advocacy is what Christ does for us whenever we sin. Whenever we sin (and yes, it is often!) Christ advocates for us before the Father: “He rises up and defends your cause, based on the merits of his own sufferings and death.” This means that we don’t need to make excuses for our sins or minimize them in hopes that God won’t see them as a big deal. Rather, we can acknowledge that sin is a big deal and our Savior is even bigger.

Reflect

1. Were there any new ideas for you in these chapters or any quotes that stood out in particular?
2. How does Christ’s nearness, intercession, and advocacy help us to understand our sin?
3. Do you regularly think of Jesus as interceding for you before the Father?
4. What difference does it make to know that it is the Father’s joy to say yes to those for whom the Son intercedes?

Week 4

Chapters 10-12: Characteristics of Christ's Heart

Sink In

In chapter 10, Dane Ortlund writes that we should be drawn into Christ's heart because of its beauty. Soak in these words for a minute:

All I mean is, ponder him through his heart. Allow yourself to be allured. Why not build into 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?

In chapter 11, the focus is on Christ's emotional life, which might not be something you've spent much time thinking about before now. When Jesus became human, he became fully human, emotional life and all. There is much to contemplate in this chapter, but I want to focus on one implication: When Christ is loving toward you, it's not simply what he does but what he feels. And the best part is that Jesus' emotions have no hint of sin, he is perfectly emotional. His emotions aren't swayed by

his sin because he has no sin. Because of this, we can trust that Christ's love for us is perfect in every single way.

Even more so, we can trust that Christ is a genuine, tender friend to every believer. On page 115, Ortlund writes, "In Jesus Christ, we are given a friend who will always enjoy rather than refuse our presence." Our perfect Savior enjoys our company! This is one way that Jesus is different than us. While sin affects our ability to perfectly love and enjoy each other, there is no sin to affect this ability within Jesus. He welcomes us in, knows us perfectly, perfectly enjoys and delights in us, and perfectly leads us as Savior and Friend. What a redeemer!

Reflect

1. How did these three chapters enable you to think differently about Jesus?
2. What does the friendship of Jesus mean to you?
3. What does it mean for you that Jesus pursues you and allows you to pursue him (page 117)?
4. How do you understand Jesus' compassion and anger after reading these chapters?

Week 5

Chapters 13-14: The Spirit and Father Together With Christ

Sink In

One of the most important aspects of Christ's revelation to us as a human is that he reveals the very heart of God. In chapters 13-14, Ortlund shows how the Spirit and Father are aligned with Christ in his heart for sinners. Although there are many things that Ortlund could write about the Holy Spirit, he chooses one important aspect of the Spirit's work: "[T]he Spirit causes us to actually feel Christ's heart for us." One of the most important things that the Holy Spirit does in your life is causes you to know Christ's heart for you, not just at an intellectual level, but deep within your soul. As Ortlund puts it, the Spirit turns the recipe of Christ into taste. To put it another way, any affections that you have toward Jesus are a result of the Spirit's work within you.

Not only does the Spirit work within us to help us believe Christ's heart toward us, the Father also works with Christ in showing mercy toward sinners. Ortlund acknowledges that many Christians struggle with the belief that Christ is for them but the Father is more reluctant to accept them. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. As Ortlund writes

of the Father and Son, “The heart of the 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.” The unity between the Father, Son, and Spirit in their love for us should be a great comfort for the Christian life. And the joy that is experienced within the Trinity is extended to every Christian believer.

Reflect

1. Were there any ideas about the Father and Spirit in these chapters that you had never encountered before?
2. Have you ever struggled to believe that the Father loves you as much as the Son does?
3. What are some of the works of the Holy Spirit mentioned in chapter 13 that stood out to you?
4. Why was it good for Christ to leave us with the Holy Spirit?

Week 6

Chapters 15-17: The Ways of the Lord

Sink In

Chapters 15-17 move into the ways and workings of the Lord in the Old Testament. Chapter 15 provides an interesting contrast between the works of judgment and mercy in God's heart. While both are characteristics of God, judgment is called his "strange work" and mercy his "natural work" because mercy is his natural delight. This is a valuable insight for the Christian because we have the temptation to believe that God is naturally more inclined towards anger than towards mercy with us; however, the heart of Christ reveals a God who pursues us in the name of mercy.

Chapter 16 looks at God's glory in the Old Testament. As Ortlund writes, God's glory is his "distinctive resplendence," or we could say that is his very *Godness*. We find in Scripture that God's glory is both his goodness in himself and his goodness toward us. Ortlund goes through the phrases of Exodus 34:6-7 that reveal the contents of God's glory:

-Merciful and gracious

-Slow to anger

-Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness

-Keeping steadfast love for thousands

Ortlund notes that even the next phrase, *visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children*, reveals God's heart because his mercy extends much further. Of course, this is most fully revealed in the life of Jesus. We cannot use our own internal navigation to understand God's glory, as Ortlund tells us in the next chapter, but we must use the navigation that God has given us in the life of Jesus and in Scripture.

Reflect

1. Did Ortlund give you any new ways to think about God's glory in these chapters?
2. In his study of Exodus 34, which phrase especially grabbed your heart from the list?
3. What practical implications did you find from Ortlund's study of Isaiah 55 in chapter 17?
4. What difference does distinguishing judgment and mercy as his "strange" and "natural" works make for how you think about God?

Week 7

Chapters 18-20: God's Heart In Action

Sink In

In the midst of Israel's exile as penalty for their sin in the book of Jeremiah, God reveals his ultimate feelings for them: *yearning love*. It is one thing to say that God has mercy, but it is another thing to see it in action, and that's exactly what we find here. The God who punished Israel for their sin was the God who yearned to show them His love and mercy, which is what he did for them in Christ. Jesus is the physical picture of God's yearning heart in action.

As we are reminded in chapter 19, God's mercy for us is not poor and meager, but rich. Ortlund makes a careful clarification on page 173 when he writes that mercy isn't something God simply has, but who he is. Earlier in the book, he spoke of grace not as a thing but as Jesus himself. Similarly, mercy is God's very character and essence. This is important because, as Ortlund writes, "If he is essentially merciful, then for him to pour out mercy is for him to act in accord with who he is." This mercy meets us in the area of our deepest need and brings us all the way to reconciliation with Christ, and then never leaves our side because our mercy is our God himself.

It is important to cling to this truth from Scripture, because our hearts lean toward the false belief that we must keep the law in order to lay claim to God's mercy. But as Ortlund says, "To help the gospel... is to lose the gospel." The beauty of the gospel is that God leads us all the way home. If we get it backwards and believe that our law-keeping leads us to Christ, then we will fail to understand the beauty of the gospel and won't live in the comforts of Christ. On the other hand, to believe the gospel more and more deeply is to rest in the comforts and assurance of Christ more and more fully.

Reflect

1. What are some new ways that you thought about God's mercy as a result of these chapters?
2. In view of Jeremiah 34, what does God's yearning love mean for you?
3. On page 173, why is it important to understand mercy not simply as God's possession but God's very character?
4. In what ways does your heart naturally turn toward lawishness, and in what ways does the gospel confront that?

Week 8

Chapters 21-23: Implications of God's Love

Sink In

The final three chapters of the book provide helpful applications for understanding God's love for us. Chapter 21 begins by telling us that God's love is not simply a past tense reality, but is present and future tense also. One temptation for Christians is to think that there comes a point when we are supposed to get it and live for God without the need for forgiveness and mercy, and the result is that we often live in quiet shame and fear that God is disappointed in us. Nothing could be further from the gospel truth. As Ortlund writes, divine love has no limit or endpoint. God's love is with us forever because he will never leave us nor forsake us.

The future tense of God's love means that he will be with us to the very end. The cross was the place where Jesus showed us the full measure of his love for us. If he is willing to go through death for you, then you can trust that he will never leave you or let you go. He will keep you fast until the end. As Ortlund says, "You cannot be un-his."

Ortlund ends the book by thinking through what it means to glorify God. You might have thought about this before, but Ortlund presents it as living in the

great joy of God that is now ours in Christ. In Ephesians 2:7, we are told that our eternal life is for God to show us the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness to us in Christ Jesus. God wants to show us eternal grace and kindness! What an incredible reminder that God's love for us is inexhaustible both in terms of depth and breadth. It covers our deepest sin and extends for our eternity. If we will soak deeply in this truth, then it will change our lives.

Reflect

1. What comforts came to your mind and heart as you read these chapters?
2. Are you ever tempted to believe that God's mercy has an endpoint or a bottom that can be reached in your life?
3. What aspect of Christ's work on the cross spoke to you in chapter 22?
4. What will be your biggest takeaway from the book?