

***Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* by Dane Ortlund (2020) Crossway, Wheaton; ILL. 216pp.**

Published in 2020 this volume brought consolation and hope to many Christians who were grappling with a new world of pandemic anxiety and fear, and political upheaval. Two years later, this book still speaks hope into the chaos of our world.

Dr. Dane Ortlund is an author and the senior minister of a Presbyterian church in Illinois and thus aware of the pressures endured by Christian leaders and laity. His intended audience for the book is “The discouraged, the frustrated, the weary, the disenchanting, the cynical, the empty... For those of us who know God loves us but suspect we have deeply disappointed him” (13).

Having established all ‘normal’ Christians are sinners and sufferers, Ortlund asks the question “How does Jesus feel about them?”. The text that undergirds the answer to this question is Matthew 11:28-30 where Jesus reveals, “I am gentle and lowly in heart”. Ortlund draws on the writings of the Puritans, particularly Thomas Goodwin, to examine how Jesus is gentle and lowly of heart and what this means for the believer. Consequently, this book does not argue evangelical doctrine but rather offers the believer a spiritual and emotional connection with God.

The 23 chapters of the book offer different insights into the heart of Jesus with forays into the need for the Spirit (ch 13), the mercy of God (ch 14) and the depiction of the heart of God in the Old Testament (chs 15-19). Each chapter contains nuggets of wisdom that reinforce the central tenet of the book.

Here are some snippets (italics in the original):

- “When Jesus sees the fallenness of the world all about him, his deepest impulse, his most natural instinct, is to move toward that sin and suffering, not away from it” (30).
- “*Jesus gets more comfort and joy than we do* when we come to him for help and mercy” (37).
- “When Jesus “deals gently” with us, he is doing what is most fitting and natural to him” (56).

- “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” (85).
- “We are drawn to God by the beauty of the heart of Jesus” (98).
- “*In Jesus Christ, we are given a friend who will always enjoy rather than refuse our presence*” (115).
- “Your gentlest treatment of yourself is less gentle than the way your heavenly Father handles you. His tenderness outstrips what you are even capable of toward yourself” (133).
- “Gentleness and lowliness of heart is who Christ is steadily, consistently, everlastingly, when all loveliness in us has withered” (197).

Ortlund’s depiction of Jesus has not been without critics who would seek to portray Him in a more hyper-masculinised and angry image, perhaps due to the politicised nature of much of today’s American evangelicalism. Nonetheless, the portrayal of a milder Jesus in this book is refreshing and compelling.

This book is best not consumed in one sitting. Instead, although it is not marketed as a devotional, it makes a great daily or even weekly devotional resource, or a small group study. To glean all that Ortlund offers in each chapter requires more than one reading, some heavy underlining, and some deep reflection. It could well act as an oasis in the life of a busy minister.

This book is wholeheartedly recommended.