

The background of the cover is a classical landscape painting. It depicts a wide valley with a large body of water in the distance, surrounded by rolling hills and mountains. In the foreground, a flock of sheep is gathered on a rocky, grassy slope. One black sheep stands out among the white ones. The overall tone is soft and atmospheric, with a focus on natural beauty and tranquility.

Dane Ortlund

GENTLE
and
LOWLY

*The Heart of Christ for
Sinners and Sufferers*

“*Gentle and Lowly* comes from the pen of someone who has not just profited from reading the Puritans—but who, more importantly, has read the Bible under their tutelage. One short book can never be enough to convey all the glory of the character of Christ, but this book deftly unpacks something we often overlook: Christ is meek and lowly in heart and gives rest to those who labor and are burdened. Written with pastoral gentleness and quiet beauty, it teases out what twenty biblical texts contribute to this portrait of the heart of Christ, all of it brought together to bring comfort, strength, and rest to believers.”

D. A. Carson, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Cofounder, The Gospel Coalition

“In this timely work, Dane Ortlund directs our attention back to the person of Jesus. Centered on the Scriptures and drawing upon the best of the Puritan tradition, Ortlund helps us see the heart of God as it is revealed to us in Christ. He reminds us not only of Jesus’s promises of rest and comfort, but of the Bible’s vision of Jesus: a kind and gracious King.”

Russell Moore, President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“The title of this book immediately evoked within me a sense of longing, hope, and gratitude. The message it contains is a balm for every heart that feels pierced by sin or sorrow—whether from within or without. It is an invitation to experience the sweet consolations of a Savior who moves toward us with tenderness and grace, when we know we deserve just the opposite from him.”

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, author; Teacher and Host, *Revive Our Hearts*

“My life has been transformed by the beautiful, staggering truths in this book. Dane Ortlund lifts our eyes to see Christ’s compassion-filled heart for sinners and sufferers, proving that Jesus is no reluctant savior but one who delights in showing his mercy. For any feeling bruised, weary, or empty, this is the balm for you.”

Michael Reeves, President and Professor of Theology, Union School of Theology, Oxford, UK

“On the rough, rocky, and often dark path between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet,’ there is nothing your weary heart needs more than to know the beauty of the heart of Jesus. It is that beauty that alone has the power to overwhelm all the ugly you will encounter along the way. I have read no book that more carefully, thoroughly, and tenderly displays Christ’s heart than what Dane Ortlund has written. As if I was listening to a great symphony, I was moved in different ways in different passages but left each feeling hugely blessed to know that what was being described was the heart of my Savior, my Lord, my Friend, and my Redeemer. I can’t think of anyone in the family of God who wouldn’t be greatly helped by spending time seeing the heart of Jesus through the eyes of such a gifted guide as Ortlund.”

Paul David Tripp, President, Paul Tripp Ministries; author, *New Morning Mercies* and *My Heart Cries Out*

“The Puritans breathed Christ-centered practices: they embraced the Bible as a lifeline, exercised it like a muscle, and relied upon it like a bulletproof vest. They knew how to hate their sin without hating themselves because they understood that Christ’s grace is an ever-present person, a person who understands our situation and our needs better than we do. They understood that we suffer because of sin. Dane Ortlund masterfully handles a treasure trove of Puritan wisdom and deftly presents it to the Christian reader. Read this book and pray that the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to you as the Puritans understood him, and you will be refreshed to understand God’s grace in a whole new way.”

Rosaria Butterfield, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*

“‘He is so strong that he can afford to be gentle.’ That old movie line is more than a throwaway sentiment when we consider the theological precision and pastoral heart of Dane Ortlund describing God’s heart toward those who are weak, weary, sin-sick, and despairing. The insights of *Gentle and Lowly* are truly a river of mercy flowing from the throne of God, through great pastors of the past, and into precious and powerful ministry for today.”

Bryan Chapell, Senior Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois

“Only a few pages in I started to realize how unusual and essential this book is—it is an exposition of the very heart of Christ. The result is a book that astonishes us with the sheer abundance and capacity of his love for us. Breathtaking and healing in equal measure, it is already one of the best books I’ve read.”

Sam Allberry, Apologist and Speaker, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries; author, *7 Myths about Singleness*

“Dane Ortlund writes about what seems too good to be true—the Lord delights to show mercy to you and to me—so he works very carefully through key texts and enlists the help of saints past. I was persuaded, and I look forward to being persuaded again and again.”

Ed Welch, Counselor and Faculty Member, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

“Dane Ortlund leads us into the very heart of God incarnate—not only what Jesus did for us, but how he *feels* toward us. That’s right: feels toward us. Anchored in Scripture and drawing on the Puritan Thomas Goodwin, this book is medicine for broken hearts.”

Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

“Dane Ortlund helps us rediscover the heart of Jesus that is the very heart of the gospel. This delightful book opens up the sheer immensity of Jesus’s tender love for us. As you immerse yourself in Christ’s very heart, you’ll find your own heart warmed at the fire of the love of God. Ortlund opens up a neglected theme among the Puritans (in bite-sized chunks that won’t overwhelm you), where you’ll discover their grasp of the beauty of Jesus’s love. Your soul needs this book. I highly recommend it.”

Paul E. Miller, author, *A Praying Life* and *J-Curve: Dying and Rising with Jesus in Everyday Life*

GENTLE

— *and* —

LOWLY

*The Heart of Christ for
Sinners and Sufferers*

Dane Ortlund

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To Hope
Luke 18:16

Fatherlike he tends and spares us
Well our feeble frame he knows
In his hand he gently bears us
Rescues us from all our foes

H. F. LYTE, 1834

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Introduction

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT the heart of Christ. Who is he? Who is he *really*? What is most natural to him? What ignites within him most immediately as he moves toward sinners and sufferers? What flows out most freely, most instinctively? Who *is* he?

This book is written for the discouraged, the frustrated, the weary, the disenchanted, 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. Who 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. Who look at our lives and know how to interpret the data only by concluding that God is fundamentally parsimonious.

It is written, in other words, for normal Christians. In short, it is for sinners and sufferers. How does Jesus feel about them?

This may already raise some eyebrows. Are we overly humanizing Jesus, talking about his feelings this way? From another angle, how does the heart of Christ relate to the doctrine of the Trinity—does Christ relate to us differently than the Father or the Spirit relates to us? Or are we already out of proportion if we ask what is most central to who Christ is? And how does his heart relate to his wrath? Yet again, how does Christ's heart fit with what we find in the Old Testament and its portrait of God?

These questions are not only legitimate but necessary. So we will proceed with theological care. But the safest way to theological fidelity is sticking close to the biblical text. And we are simply going to ask what the Bible says about the heart of Christ and consider the glory of his heart for our own up-and-down lives.

But we are neither the first nor the smartest to read the Bible. Throughout the history of the church God has raised up uniquely gifted and insightful teachers to walk the rest of us into the green pastures and still waters of who God in Christ is. One particularly concentrated period of history in which God provided penetrating Bible teachers was 1600s England and the age of the Puritans. This book on Christ's heart would not exist if I had not stumbled upon the Puritans and especially Thomas Goodwin. It is Goodwin more than anyone who has opened my eyes to who God in Christ is, most naturally and easily, for fickle sinners. But Goodwin and the others raised in this book such as Sibbes and Bunyan are channels, not sources. The Bible is the source. They're just showing us with particular clarity and insight what the Bible has been telling us all along about who God actually is.

And so the strategy of this book will simply be to take either a Bible passage or a bit of teaching from the Puritans or others and consider what is being said about the heart of God and of Christ. We will consider the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, the apostles John and Paul, the Puritans Goodwin and Sibbes and Bunyan and Owen, and others such as Edwards and Spurgeon and Warfield and open ourselves up to what they tell us about the heart of God and the heart of Christ. The controlling question is: Who *is* he? There will be a fairly natural progression through the book from chapter to chapter, though not so much as a logically building argument but rather looking at the single diamond of Christ's heart from many different angles.

It is one thing to ask what Christ has done. And there are many sound books on this. Consider Stott's *The Cross of Christ*;¹ or Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach's *Pierced for Our Transgressions*;² or Macleod's *Christ Crucified*;³ or Packer's seminal 1974 article;⁴ or a dozen other solid historical or contemporary treatments. We are not focusing centrally on what Christ has done. We are considering who he is. The two matters are bound up together and indeed interdependent. But they are distinct. The gospel offers us not only legal exoneration—inviolably precious truth!—it also sweeps us into Christ's very heart. You might know that Christ died and rose again on your behalf to

1 John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

2 Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Recovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

3 Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

4 J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 3–45.

rinse you clean of all your sin; but do you know his deepest heart for you? Do you live with an awareness not only of his atoning work for your sinfulness but also of his longing heart amid your sinfulness?

A wife may tell you much about her husband—his height, his eye color, his eating habits, his education, his job, his handiness around the house, his best friend, his hobbies, his Myers-Briggs personality profile, his favorite sports team. But what can she say to communicate his knowing gaze across the table over a dinner at their favorite restaurant? That look that reflects years of ever-deepening friendship, thousands of conversations and arguments through which they have safely come, a time-ripened settling into the assurance of embrace, come what may? That glance that speaks in a moment his loving protection more clearly than a thousand words? In short, what can she say to communicate to another her husband's *heart* for her?

It is one thing to describe what your husband says and does and looks like. It is something else, something deeper and more real, to describe his heart for you.

So with Christ. 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.

Who is he?

His Very Heart

I am gentle and lowly in heart.

MATTHEW 11:29

MY DAD POINTED OUT TO ME something that Charles Spurgeon pointed out to him. In the four Gospel accounts given to us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—eighty-nine chapters of biblical text—there’s only one place where Jesus tells us about his own heart.

We learn much in the four Gospels about Christ’s teaching. We read of his birth, his ministry, and his disciples. We are told of his travels and prayer habits. We find lengthy speeches and repeated objections by his hearers, prompting further teaching. We learn of the way he understood himself to fulfill the whole Old Testament. And we learn in all four accounts of his unjust arrest and shameful death and astonishing resurrection. Consider the thousands of pages that have been written by theologians over the past two thousand years on all these things.

But in only one place—perhaps the most wonderful words ever uttered by human lips—do we hear Jesus himself open up to us his very heart:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28–30)¹

In the one place in the Bible where the Son of God pulls back the veil and lets us peer way down into the core of who he is, we are not told that he is “austere and demanding in heart.” We are not told that he is “exalted and dignified in heart.” We are not even told that he is “joyful and generous in heart.” Letting Jesus set the terms, his surprising claim is that he is “gentle and lowly in heart.”

One thing to get straight right from the start is that when the Bible speaks of the heart, whether Old Testament or New, it is not speaking of our emotional life only but of the central animating center of all we do. It is what gets us out of bed in the morning and what we daydream about as we drift off to sleep. It is our motivation headquarters. The heart, in biblical terms, is not part of who we are but the center of who we are. Our heart is what defines and directs us. That is why Solomon tells us to “keep [the] heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23).² The

1 Matt. 11:29 was the German Reformer Philip Melancthon’s favorite verse in the Bible. Herman Bavinck, “John Calvin: A Lecture on the Occasion of His 400th Birthday,” trans. John Bolt, *The Bavinck Review* 1 (2010): 62.

2 Another Puritan, John Flavel, devoted a whole treatise to this verse and to strategies to maintain the heart: John Flavel, *Keeping the Heart: How to Maintain Your Love for God* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012).