

Gentle & Lowly | Questions for Discussion

INTRODUCTION

1. Ortlund writes, *"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 (p. 13-14)."*
 - Do any of these descriptions particularly resonate with you? Which one(s)?
 - How does it strike you to hear his last statement that this book is written *"for normal Christians"*?
2. This is an important question to discuss together at the beginning of the book: *How do you really think Jesus feels about you?* Please be vulnerable here. Don't give the "right" answer, give your "honest" answer.
3. Why do you think it's so hard to believe the "right" answer?

Ask each member of your group to highlight 1-2 sentences that encourages them, challenge them or confuses them as they read the chapter. At the beginning of each week, take some time to share them and discuss together.

CHAPTER 1 | "HIS VERY HEART"

Matthew 11:29 – ²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *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.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*"

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: There are four words particularly important in this chapter. Take some time to unpack each:

2. **Heart** | Ortlund writes, *"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... It is what makes us the human being each of us is. The heart drives all we do. It is who we are (p. 18-19)."*

- How does this description of the heart change the way you understand Jesus, statement that he is "gentle and lowly in heart?"

3. **Gentle** | We find the same word translated "gentle" in Matthew 5:5 ("meek"), Matthew 21:5 ("humble") and 1 Peter 3:4 ("gentle"). Take a moment to look these up these verses.

- How does this help you better understand what it means for Jesus' heart to be "gentle?"
- Do you find it easy to believe his heart is "gentle?"

4. **Lowly** | Ortlund writes, *"typically throughout the New Testament this Greek word refers not to humility as a virtue but to humility in the sense of destitution or being thrust downward by life circumstance... The point in saying that Jesus is lowly is that he is accessible. For all his resplendent glory and dazzling holiness, his supreme uniqueness and otherness, no one in human history has ever been more approachable than Jesus Christ (p. 20)."*

- How does this help you better understand what it means for Jesus' heart to be "lowly?"

5. **Yoke** | Read the two paragraphs on page 22-23 ("That notion of kindness... out of bed in the morning.")

- Try to summarize what Jesus is saying when describing this yoke in one sentence.

Getting personal:

6. What burdens are weighing your life down right now? How do you respond to knowing that Jesus is offering to trade your burdens for his kind and buoyant "anti-burden?"
7. How can you create ways to continually remind yourself of the "anti-burden" offered you in Christ? How can you remind one another of the amazing truth of Jesus' gentle and lowly heart toward you? Jesus' delight in you is not dependent upon your performance or ability to bear every burden. As Thomas Goodwin wrote, *"[T]his high and holy Christ does not cringe at reaching out and touching dirty sinners and numbed sufferers. Such embrace is precisely what he loves to do."*
8. How does knowing that Jesus is tender and approachable shape the way you interact with him?

CHAPTER 2 | "HIS HEART IN ACTION"

Matthew 14:14 - ¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: As we continue to speak about the "heart" of Christ, remember what Ortlund says, *"When we speak of Christ's heart, we are not so much speaking of one attribute alongside others. We are asking who he most deeply is. What pours out of him most naturally (p. 29)?"* In this chapter we continue to learn about the heart of Christ by looking at his life because *"his life proves his heart (p. 25)."*

2. Ortlund names a few examples of how Jesus moves toward sinners and sufferers, can you think of any other examples from the gospels?
3. Ortlund writes, *"The cumulative testimony of the four Gospels is that when Jesus Christ 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 (p. 30)."* ... Ortlund writes again, *"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 does Jesus' impulse to move toward sinners and sufferers tell us about his heart?
 - How does this effect what you believe of Christ's response to your sin?
4. Ortlund points out, *"When Jesus, the Clean One, touched an unclean sinner, Christ did not become unclean. The sinner became clean (p. 31)."* What happens when the impure is met by the pure? How does the clean one clean us?
5. Reread the last paragraph of the chapter together (p. 32-33). How does our union with Christ shape our life in this world as sinners and sufferers?

Getting personal:

6. The natural impulse of Jesus heart is to move toward sinners and sufferers. Do you find this easy or difficult to believe? How will being reminded of this truth shape your relationship with him?
7. Does the natural impulse of your heart move you toward or away from sinners and sufferers? How might you imitate the compassion of Christ? Who in your life might God be calling you to move toward with his love?
8. Take some time to reflect and answer, "How have you experienced Jesus' compassion in your own life?"

CHAPTER 3 | "THE HAPPINESS OF CHRIST"

Hebrews 12:2 - Jesus, [...] for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?
2. When we fall before Jesus, broken and needy, as sinners and sufferers, what happens in Jesus' heart? Does he grumble and say, "Oh, you again?" or does he delight in the opportunity to heal and forgive?

Dive Deep: We may often feel that Jesus administers his mercy and love for sinners and sufferers hesitantly or begrudgingly. In this short and potent chapter, we gain a better understanding of how Jesus feels when he finds broken and sinful people at his feet. Let's spend our time focusing on four illustrations from the chapter:

3. **Doctor** - Read the story of the missionary doctor on p. 36. What does it teach us about how Jesus feels when you come to him for help (see Hebrews 12:2, Luke 15:7, John 17:24)?

Husband - Ortlund writes, *"In the same way that a loving husband gets more relief and comfort in his wife's healing than in his own, Christ brings in to himself more comfort . . . than it procures to them when he sees our sins being placed under his own blood (p. 37)."* How does this illustration continue to build your understanding of how Jesus feels about helping you?

4. **Father** - Ortlund writes, *"Is it not presumptuous audacity to draw on the mercy of Christ in an unfiltered way? Shouldn't we be measured and reasonable, careful not to pull too much on him? Would a father with a suffocating child want his child to draw on the oxygen tank in a measured, reasonable way (p. 40)?"* What does this illustration teach us about how we should come to him?
5. **Body** - Ortlund writes, *"Christ is the head; we are his own body parts. How does a head feel about his own flesh? ... How do we care for a wounded body part? We nurse it, bandage it, protect it, give it time to heal. For that body part isn't just a close friend; it is part of us. So with Christ and believers. We are part of him (p. 40-41)."* How does this illustration continue to build your understanding of why Jesus delights in helping you (See Ephesians 5:29-30 & Acts 9:4)?

Getting personal:

6. Do you ever feel as though you're being presumptuous in coming to Jesus? Like you're asking too much of him? Why?
7. Ortlund writes, *"He does not get flustered and frustrated when we come to him for fresh forgiveness, for renewed pardon, with distress and need and emptiness. That's the whole point. It's what he came to heal (p. 36-37)."* He also writes, *"Christ's heart is not drained by our coming to him; his heart is filled up all the more by our coming to him (p. 38)."* Do you struggle to believe this? Is there anything you're not bringing before the Lord for fear of his displeasure?
8. Read Romans 12:5. How does the knowledge that we are members of the same body effect the way you respond to your brothers/sisters when they come to you broken and needing help, mercy and love? What might it look like for you to imitate Christ's love for them? Is there anyone in the body you've failed to move toward with the love of Christ?

CHAPTER 4 | "ABLE TO SYMPATHIZE"

Hebrews 4:15 - *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: Jesus is not distant and removed from the trials we walk through in this world; rather he came to earth as a man, and is therefore able in every respect to sympathize with our weaknesses and temptations.

2. Ortlund writes, *"The reason that Jesus is in such close solidarity with us is that the difficult path we are on is not unique to us. He has journeyed on it himself. It is not only that Jesus can relieve us from our troubles, like a doctor prescribing medicine; it is also that, before any relief comes, he is with us in our troubles, like a doctor who has endured the same disease (p. 47)... That enticing temptation, that sore trial, that bewildering perplexity—he has been there (p. 48)."* How does this bring you comfort in your suffering and temptation?
3. **"in every respect"** - Why should these three words matter to you?
4. **"yet without sin"** - Why does it matter that Jesus remained sinless?
5. Hebrews 4:14 says, *"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."*
 - What does it mean to *"hold fast our confession"*?
 - How does v.14 connect to v.15? (**hint:** consider the word *"for"* in v.15)
6. Hebrews 4:16 says, *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*
 - What does this verse call for us to do?
 - How does v.16 flow out of v.15? (**hint:** consider the word *"then"* in v.16)

Getting personal:

7. What suffering are you facing right now in your life? How does it help you to know that Jesus is able to sympathize with your weaknesses?
8. What temptations are you facing in your life? How does it help you to know that Jesus, in every respect, has been tempted as we are? Does it encourage or discourage you to remember that he was tempted, but never sinned? Why? Be vulnerable.

CHAPTER 5 | “HE CAN DEAL GENTLY”

Hebrews 5:2 -² *He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.*

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: In the last chapter we saw the “what” of Christ’s priestly role by looking together at Hebrews 4:15. We now look closer at the “how” of Christ’s priestly role by looking together at Hebrews 5:2.

2. In an effort to describe what is meant by “gentle” in Hebrews 5:2, Ortlund writes, *“The idea here in 5:2 is that Jesus does not throw his hands up in the air when he engages sinners. He is calm, tender, soothing, restrained. He deals with us gently (p. 53).”*
 - Is this the way you naturally think about Jesus dealing with your sin?
3. What does Ortlund say is meant by the words *“ignorant and wayward?”* on p. 53-54? What does this tell us about the scope of his gentleness?
4. What causes Jesus to respond gently to our ignorance and waywardness? How does Jesus’ gentle response shape the way we are to respond to sin, guilt and shame?
 - What therefore are we do in our guilt and shame?
5. According to Hebrews 5:2, for what reason can Jesus deal with us gently? (**hint:** consider the word “since”) what does it mean for him to be *“beset with weakness?”*

Getting personal:

6. Ortlund writes, *“if our priest himself knew what our weakness felt like so that he was in deepest sympathy with us, yet had never himself sinned, and so his heart had never turned in on himself in self-pity or self-absorption—that would be a priest truly able to deal gently with us (p. 52).”*
 - How does the knowledge that he can understand you in your weaknesses help you run confidently into his gentle embrace?
7. Ortlund writes, *“As long as you fix your attention on your sin, you will fail to see how you can be safe. But as long as you look to this high priest, you will fail to see how you can be in danger (p. 57).”*
 - Do you struggle to truly believe this?
 - Is there something in your life your afraid/ashamed to surrender to Christ?

CHAPTER 6 | “I WILL NEVER CAST OUT”

John 6:37 - ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: In this chapter we focused our attention on the powerful words of John 6:37 which tell us that all who come to Jesus, he “will never cast out.” Let’s consider how this is a continual hope for sinners and sufferers.

2. Ortlund takes this passage and focuses on one word at a time. Take a moment to look at the key words of this passage. What does each tell you about Jesus? Does one in particular encourage or speak to you? (see p. 60-61)

- **All**
- the **Father**
- **gives**
- **will** come
- and **whoever comes**
- to **me**
- I will **never cast out**

3. **Sinners** - Ortlund writes, “Fallen, anxious sinners are limitless in their capacity to perceive reasons for Jesus to cast them out. We are factories of fresh resistances to Christ’s love (p. 63).”

- What objections would you raise to whether you deserve Christ’s love?
- Why can you be certain that he will not cast you out (consider Psalm 63:8)?

4. Read the imagined debate between us and Jesus on p. 62.

- Which objections do you most resonate with?
- Which responses from Jesus most spoke to, comforted or challenged you?

5. **Sufferers** - Ortlund writes, “Perhaps it isn’t sins so much as sufferings that cause some of us to question the perseverance of the heart of Christ. As pain piles up, as numbness takes over, as the months go by, at some point the conclusion seems obvious: we have been cast out...But Jesus does not say that those with pain-free lives are never cast out. He says those who come to him are never cast out (p. 64-65).”

- In your suffering, have you ever been tempted to think that Christ has cast you out?

Getting personal:

9. Do you ever feel like you’re so sinful that Jesus must be done with you? How does this passage challenge that assumption?
10. Respond in prayer. Pray to God about your doubts and objections to his love and ask for his strength to trust his heart.

CHAPTER 7 | “WHAT OUR SINS EVOKE”

Hosea 11:8 – My heart recoils within me

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: In this chapter we focus our attention on the topic of God’s wrath. It’s a scary word that we seldom use in polite conversation, yet is a word that accurately answers the question, “What do our sins deserve?” Yet, as we better understand this word, we better understand our sin and the amazing love that lead Christ to deliver us from it.

2. Ortlund writes, *“The reason we feel as if divine wrath can easily be overstated is that we do not feel the true weight of sin (p. 67).”*
 - What does it mean to “feel the weight of your sin?” How would you put this in your own words?
 - What does the author say prevents us from feeling the weight of sin? What does he mean by this?
3. Ortlund writes, *“when we sin, the very heart of Christ is drawn out to us (p. 69)... Just as the purer a heart, the more horrified at evil, so also the purer a heart, the more it is naturally drawn out to help and relieve and protect and comfort, whereas a corrupt heart sits still, indifferent. So with Christ. His holiness finds evil revolting, more revolting than any of us ever could feel. But it is that very holiness that also draws his heart out to help and relieve and protect and comfort (p. 69-70; see Romans 5:20).”*
 - What does Ortlund mean by this? How would you put it in your own words?
4. Ortlund writes, *“If you are part of Christ’s own body, your sins evoke his deepest heart, his compassion and pity. He “takes part with you”—that is, he’s on your side. He sides with you against your sin, not against you because of your sin. He hates sin. But he loves you. We understand this, says Goodwin, when we consider the hatred, a father has against a terrible disease afflicting his child—the father hates the disease while loving the child. Indeed, at some level the presence of the disease draws out his heart to his child all the more (p. 71).”*
 - What is the one determining factor that causes God’s mercy to flow out for us when we sin?

Getting personal:

5. Ortlund writes, *“Just as we so easily live with a diminished view of the punitive judgment of God that will sweep over those out of Christ, so we easily live with a diminished view of the compassionate heart of God sweeping over those in Christ (p. 74-75).”*
 - If you are his child, then God draws near to you when you sin and suffer. How will this shape your response next time you sin against him?

CHAPTER 8 | “TO THE UTTERMOST”

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

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?
2. Before reading this chapter, how would you have answered the question, “What is Jesus doing now?”

Dive Deep: This chapter gives us the opportunity to focus on the continued ministry of Jesus’ “intercession” for us (Romans 8:33-34; Hebrews 7:25). Take some time together to discuss what this doctrine means, what it tells us about Jesus’ heart and how it encourages you as you continue to live for him in this world.

3. Let’s first wrap our heads around this often neglected idea of Christ’s intercession. Ortlund writes, *“The divine Son never ceases [...] to bring his atoning life, death, and resurrection before his Father in a moment-by-moment way. Christ ‘turns the Father’s eyes to his own righteousness,’ wrote Calvin, ‘to avert his gaze from our sins. He so reconciles the Father’s heart to us that by his intercession he prepares a way and access for us to the Father’s throne.’ [...] Christ continues to intercede on our behalf in heaven because we continue to fail here on earth (p. 83-84).”*
 - What is intercession? How would you explain it in your own words?
 - Why do we need intercession continually if we are fully justified and forgiven forever?
 - We don’t talk about this a lot. Is there anything about this idea that confuses you? Discuss together.
4. Ortlund writes, *“His interceding for us reflects his heart—the same heart that carried him through life and down into death on behalf of his people is the heart that now manifests itself in constant pleading with and reminding and prevailing upon his Father to always welcome us (p. 80).”* He later writes, *“his posture right now as he is in heaven, his disposition, his deepest desire, is to pour his heart out on our behalf before the Father. The intercession of Christ is his heart connecting our heart to the Father’s heart (p. 81-82).”*
 - Is Christ reluctant to intercede for us or hungry to intercede for us? Why?
 - How does knowing His heart help to transform your trust in coming to Him with your sin and suffering?

Getting personal:

5. Ortlund writes, *“We say we are totally forgiven. And we sincerely believe our sins are forgiven. Pretty much, anyway. But there’s that one deep, dark part of our lives, even our present lives, that seems so intractable, so ugly, so beyond recovery. ‘To the uttermost’ in Hebrews 7:25 means: God’s forgiving, redeeming, restoring touch reaches down into the darkest crevices of our souls, those places where we are most ashamed, most defeated (p. 83).”*
 - Can you relate to this? If your comfortable sharing, what areas of your life do you find it hard to believe Christ’s “forgiving, redeeming and restoring touch” reaches into? By being vulnerable, your brothers/sisters will be able to encourage you in this and you will do likewise.
 - How would you answer Ortlund’s question, “what if you heard Jesus praying aloud for you in the next room?”

CHAPTER 9 | “AN ADVOCATE”

1 John 2:1 – *We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: Last week we learned that Jesus is an intercessor. This week we learn that he is our advocate. In this chapter Ortlund unpacks the difference between these two titles and helps us see what that practically means for us.

2. 1 John 2:1 says, *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”*
 - Though this calls us not to sin, it acknowledges that we will. Does it encourage you to know that Jesus is not surprised by your imperfections?
 - Who does this passage tell us Jesus will advocate for?
 - When does this passage tell us his advocacy will go into effect?
 - Why does this passage say that Jesus is able to advocate for us?
3. Ortlund explains the difference between an intercessor and an advocate like this: *“An intercessor stands between two parties; an advocate doesn’t simply stand in between the two parties but steps over and joins the one party as he approaches the other (p. 87).”* He then explains later, *“Intercession is something Christ is always doing, while advocacy is something he does as occasion calls for it (p. 90).”*
 - How would you describe the difference between intercession and advocacy in your own words?
 - What is your gut level reaction to this? Excitement? Rest? Hope? Confusion? Etc.
 - We don’t talk about this a lot. Is there anything about this idea of Christ’s advocacy that confuses you? Discuss together.
4. Ortlund writes, *“When you sin, remember your legal standing before God because of the work of Christ; but remember also your advocate before God because of the heart of Christ. He rises up and defends your cause, based on the merits of his own sufferings and death. Your salvation is not merely a matter of a saving formula, but of a saving person. When you sin, his strength of resolve rises all the higher. When his brothers and sisters fail and stumble, he advocates on their behalf because it is who he is. He cannot bear to leave us alone to fend for ourselves (p. 91).”*
 - This excellently explains what it means for Christ to be the advocate. How does this give us hope when we sin?

Getting personal:

5. In his closing words, Ortlund pleads, *“Do not minimize your sin or excuse it away. Raise no defense. Simply take it to the one who is already at the right hand of the Father, advocating for you on the basis of his own wounds. Let your own unrighteousness, in all your darkness and despair, drive you to Jesus Christ, the righteous, in all his brightness and sufficiency (p. 94).”*
 - Our gut reaction is to advocate for ourselves. How does the advocacy of Christ change that?

CHAPTER 10 | “THE BEAUTY OF THE HEART OF CHRIST”

Matthew 10:37 – whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me

1. Share one thing that particularly spoke to, comforted or challenged you from this chapter?

Dive Deep: In this last chapter of these discussion questions Ortlund points us to the beauty of the heart of Jesus Christ. This chapter offers an encouragement so basic and so simple to the Christian life that it often goes overlooked.

2. At the beginning of the chapter we read these words from Jonathan Edwards: *“There is no love so great and so wonderful as that which is in the heart of Christ... The love and grace that Christ has manifested does as much exceed all that which is in this world as the sun is brighter than a candle. Parents are often full of kindness towards their children, but that is no kindness like Jesus Christ’s (p. 96).”*
 - How do you feel when you read these words?
 - How are you tempted to seek a greater love from others?
 - How does it shape your life you to know that the one who will never leave you, nor forsake you, is the one who loves you with the greatest and most wonderful love of all?
3. Ortlund writes, *“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 (p. 99)?”*
 - This paragraph is provocative, but it’s encouragement is so simple. What is it?
 - Is there a word or phrase in this paragraph that grabs your attention or uniquely challenges you?
 - When do you give your soul room to be “reenchanting” by Christ’s heart? What might this look like?

(**some ideas:** scheduling time of prayerful silence & solitude, meditating on the Word of God, intentionally praying prayers of gratitude, making a list of ways he has shown himself to be faithful to you, reminding yourself of his promises)
4. As Ortlund draws the chapter to a close he casts a beautiful vision for the responsibility of Godly parents saying, *“Our goal is that our kids would leave the house at eighteen and be unable to live the rest of their lives believing that their sins and sufferings repel Christ (p. 100).”*
 - Ortlund is calling us to pass on to the next generation an understanding of the heart of Christ. Whether or not you have kids in the home, who in your life might God be calling you to help see the beauty of the heart of Jesus?

Getting personal:

5. One great way to bear witness to the heart of Jesus is through testimony. Go around the room and share testimony of times in your life where you found yourself reenchanting by the beauty of the heart of Christ.

I hope this book has been a sweet time to meditate upon the heart of Jesus for you in your sin and suffering. Though the discussion questions are over, I’d encourage you to read on, allowing your heart to be drawn more and more into the beauty and mercy of the heart of Christ.