

September 14, 2025

“Gentle and Lowly: His Very Heart”

[Matthew 11:28-30](#); [Philippians 2:5-11](#)

*** Highlighted text was shown on screen during service.

I could say so much about this book. I can say less about the author, Dane Ortlund [We are using his book, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, to guide us through the scriptures for this sermon series]. I’d never heard of him until someone handed me the book last Spring. What grabbed me right away wasn’t just the content of chapter 1 – as compelling as it is – but Dane’s explanation on the first page of The Introduction about WHO the book is for: (from page 13) “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 elevator. Those who find ourselves thinking, ‘How could I mess up that bad – again!’ [For those who have an] increasing suspicion that God’s patience 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. [It is for those] 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” [as in stingy]. [And then here’s the line I think we all need to hear.] “It is written, in other words, for **normal Christians**. In short, it is for sinners and sufferers.” Dane Ortlund wrote this book so that all of us would more deeply and biblically understand the heart of Christ for us.

[Philippians 2:5-11](#) and Pray

Can you hear Jesus?

Can you see Him looking directly at you?

Can you hear His invitation?

“Come to Me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.”
(Matthew 11:28)

Can you also hear Him disclose the very center of who He is while giving such an invitation?

“I am gentle and humble (lowly) in **heart**.” (Matthew 11:29b) As you probably read, Dane’s father pointed out to him this is the only place in the Gospel stories that Jesus describes His own heart.

He also explains (p. 18-19) what a person’s “Heart” meant for Jesus’ original hearers. [Though the New Testament was written in Greek, that’s not the language of Jesus. In fact, it’s always helpful to remember that, though the New Testament IS written in Greek it was thought in

Hebrew.] It's different than the way we have come to think of 'the heart' – as a place of mere emotions and feelings. 'The heart' for Jesus was the core, the "central animating center of all we do. [The heart] 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." (page 18)

For Jesus, using His own words, at the core He is Gentle and Lowly.

Ortlund shows the overlap of these two particular Greek words, only used in a couple other places throughout the New Testament: Meek. Humble. Gentle. Lowly. They all sort of run together. Ortlund unpacks "lowly" a bit more. "The point in saying that Jesus is lowly is that He is accessible . . . approachable." (page 20) John's Gospel says Jesus "lived among us." But a hymn in the Early Church sings it: Christ Jesus, ". . . though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He **humbled** [same Greek word as Matthew 11:29] Himself . . ." (Philippians 2:6-8a) Jesus – God the Son – came as near to us as near can be. What allows someone to stoop that low? Humility! And what did Jesus also do, that was even more humbling, even humiliating? He DIED ON A CROSS. And that humiliating act was the result or outflow of who He was – at the motivational, heart level. Jesus was Gentle and Lowly.

Jesus refers to this Gentle and Lowly accessibility as His way; He calls it His "yoke," which He invites us to 'take on.' Many of you may know that a yoke was a working instrument, applied and fastened around the necks of two oxen or bulls so that they could – together – pull a plow and till a field. Does that sound "restful" to you? [Ortlund points out Jesus didn't say "rest for your bodies" but rest for your souls 😊]

Every rabbi had a yoke; a way that his disciples took on/put on. Jesus' yoke still involved a 'work' of sort; but it's carried out in partnership with Him. That's the part of the yoke metaphor He wants us to grasp: one animal gets paired with another one; they walk and work together. Jesus isn't inviting us to sit and listen to Him teach a class. He's inviting us to become and stay connected to Him while we walk through life together. And, like many oxen yoked together, one always does more of the pulling.

Can you guess who that would be in our case?

Jesus says that joining Him in this (HIS) "yoked way" adds a lightness/ease to life. Ortlund says on page 22 that "easy" doesn't mean 'pain-free' but **kind**. The kindness of Jesus adds a lightness to our lives of faith and obedience in a way that helium adds lightness to a balloon. A balloon is still a balloon, but what's IN the balloon changes everything; determines whether it rises or falls (literally).

So, Jesus' way or yoke is easy or light.

But what is it easier or lighter than? Light or easy compared to what?

Let me attempt to answer that good question.

Jesus' Way/Yoke – what we call the Gospel or Good News – is different than the Religious Self-Salvation Projects prevalent in His day that simply weighed people down. Whether intentionally or not, much of the teaching of Jesus' day made it sound/seem like our obedience led to God loving us – and not the other way around. And performance-based religion is still a WAY/Yoke that's alive and well today inside and outside of the Church; and many of us have tried it on over the years. **Anything that sounds like 'do this and then God will love you, or love you more, or bless you more, be on your side more' is NOT Jesus' Way.**

That's why Eugene Peterson translates Matthew 11:28-30 like this: **"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."** (Matthew 11:28-30 in *The Message*) Peterson only uses the word 'rest' once in his translation, but it occurs twice in the Greek. Notice instead he emphasizes Jesus' twice-promised rest by calling it "REAL REST." Rest-Rest!

Jesus is claiming that, in life, there's the Rest He gives and there's Relief which is what religion offers. What's the difference between **Rest vs. Relief**? Do you have a picture in your head of the difference? Have you felt the difference in your own heart?

[Here I gave a rather lengthy description of someone holding a little baby, rocking them and whispering "Shhh, Shhh, Shhh." I was trying to highlight that feeling of being held, safe and beloved . . . soothed – no matter what. I compared that to how we often feel when we are caught doing something wrong – especially as a kid or teenager. Our parents may forgive us and still love us, but we're pretty sure they're still mad at us; like we have to prove ourselves again to them; get back in their good graces. But, at least, we're good for now. "Whew!" Do you see how different "Shhh, shhh, shhh" is from "Whew"? There's rest and there's relief.]

Jesus is offering Gospel Rest to anyone who is weary of trying to earn God's love, save themselves, get a passing grade, get back on God's good side. The invitation isn't to earn the gift of rest, but to acknowledge the weariness and burden of trying to get it right on our own – apart from the grace and mercy of the One who became Gentle and Lowly to the point of death . . . "even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8b)

Aren't you weary?

[9-11; this week's Shootings and Assassinations; the fear and name-calling. And that's just in our country.]

Are you also weary about your inability to keep from getting caught up in it all – maybe even adding to it at some level?

Are you weary of just being “Relieved” every time you mess up again?

Would you like to find “Rest” in God’s never-ending embrace? (Sh . . . sh . . . sh)

Isaiah 40 reminds us that “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary . . . God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.” (Isaiah 40:28b-29) And the God who spoke these words – through the prophet Isaiah during the weariness of exile . . . the God who gave this promise offering strength to the weary is the same One who said “Come to Me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” (Sh . . . sh . . . sh)

It’s the same God. Not Old Testament ‘bad cop’ vs. New Testament ‘good cop.’ And we know they are the same God because of something Jesus says just before Jesus gives this invitation to ‘Come to Him,’ He says, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and ANYONE to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” (Matthew 11:27)

Jesus is the full revealing (revelation) of who God is. In Christ, God gives us a window into His very heart. He promises rest from self-salvation programs and spiritual improvement projects in which so much of the attention is on US and what WE need to do and how much harder WE need to work . . . and that can become SO exhausting! We can be exhausting ourselves.

But there’s an alternative life for you and me. And it’s been made possible because the One who was in very nature God did NOT focus on Himself . . . or put Himself first . . . or rely on His own power. Instead, Jesus “emptied Himself.”

How much more humble could anyone be?

How much more accessible can anyone make themselves?

How much more Gentle and Lowly could we want?

That’s who is inviting you and me to come to Him; not just once . . . but again and again.