

Real Change for Real Sinners

DEEPER

DANE C. ORTLUND

R BOOK REVIEW // DEEPER REAL CHANGE FOR REAL SINNERS DANE C. ORTLUND // REVIEWED BY CASSIE WATSON

Think of your worst sin. The one you just can't seem to shake off, no matter how many resolutions you make. The one you avoid telling people about—or if you do, you hide just how deep its roots have infiltrated into your heart.

What will it take to kill that sin?

If you're like me, you vacillate between despair ("I'll never be free of this sin, so there's no point trying") and thinking that freedom is just around the corner—once you make the right plan, read one more book, or get the right accountability structures in place.

While all these strategies are good things, when we have this mindset we're missing the most important element. We're forgetting that growth isn't about finding something new but rather about going deeper into what we already have. It's about knowing more and more of Jesus Christ.

This is the goal of Dane Ortlund's new book, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners*. He wants to "coach [us] into that single, simple, all-determining impulse of the heart: looking to Jesus" (172). That's where real growth comes from.

LOOK TO JESUS

Ortlund points out a mistake many of us make: thinking that "the healthy Christian life is basically a matter of our efforts, baptized with a little extra push from Jesus" (25). Rather, he says, we'll only experience true, lasting growth—and joy—

when we go deeper into Jesus. He's the one who transforms us, not our own efforts. We need to ask ourselves: Who do we think Jesus is? And how does he view us?

To get us started with knowing Christ better, Ortlund briefly covers eight attributes of Jesus in the opening chapter. He emphasises that these are just the tip of the iceberg. We could spend our whole lives learning more about Jesus and never reaches the depths of who he is—and indeed, this is what we will spend eternity doing!

THEOLOGY FOR THE HEART

The exhortation to "look to Christ" is not fluffy—*Deeper* is a profoundly theological book. After taking us through some attributes of Jesus, in chapter 5 Ortlund emphasises how crucial the doctrine of justification is:

If we long to grow in Christ, we dare not do what comes so naturally—namely, say we believe that the verdict over our lives is decisively settled in our justified status before God but then move on to other ideas and strategies when it comes to our emotional lives and daily pressures. (99)

We might think of justification as the thing that starts the Christian life, but it's actually what sustains our daily growth in grace. We need to go deeper into the truth that, since Jesus has paid decisively for all our sins, God loves us and is *for us* no matter how well we follow his commands. We'll never grow if our motivation is to earn God's love.

I also appreciated that *Deeper* includes a chapter on our union with Christ, a doctrine that I don't think is sufficiently understood or appreciated today. When we see how profoundly united to Jesus we are, we have a sharper sense of both the seriousness of our sin and the wonder of our redemption.

WHAT NOW?

As I was reading this book, I found myself wishing often that Ortlund would be more practical—I wanted action steps that I could do. But that very impulse betrayed how much I really needed the book. More than anything else, I need to soak in the truth of who Jesus is and what he's done for me.

It's only with that foundation that I can put to death the stubborn sins in my life and “work out [my] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil.

2:12). Ortlund does cover the classic practices for growth (Bible reading, prayer, relationships with other Christians) but always emphasizes that these are God's means for changing us, not ways we achieve it ourselves. The Holy Spirit uses these practices to “ignite our contemplation of Jesus Christ” (168), which is what leads to real change.

Deeper is a much-needed book for all of us who are tempted to rely on ourselves for growth. Ortlund builds on the wonderful truths from his first book, *Gentle and Lowly*, to teach us that true change comes from knowing the Saviour whose love for us never wavers—even in our worst failures. We need more of Jesus if we're to find, like the subtitle says, “real change for real sinners,” rather than “surface change for theoretical sinners” (17–18). Read this book and come further up and further in.



“As I read Dane's words, I can sense my heart growing in trust, devotion, and godly affections, grounded in the Savior's love for me. In this incredibly helpful, pastoral book, Dane works out the implications of that vision of Jesus for personal growth.”

J. D. GREER

Lead Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

“That angst in your soul for more is a part of the growing process—a gift of hunger and thirst that Jesus, the inexhaustible well, will fill. If you are hungry and thirsty for more life, more joy, more peace, and more Jesus, this is a book for you.”

MATT CHANDLER

Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas; President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network

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