



THE SCANDAL OF THE KINGDOM

WORKBOOK

BASED ON THE BOOK BY
DALLAS WILLARD

WRITTEN BY JAN JOHNSON



The Scandal of the Kingdom Workbook
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INTRODUCTION

If you've read stories to children, you know that a lot happens behind their eyes and in their minds besides simply hearing words. You can see it on their faces—they're having an *experience*! They perk up if one of the characters is like them. They feel sad when the characters have troubles. The same is true for us adults with certain books and movies.

Jesus knew the power of narrative, so he offered stories to illustrate truths about God and his kingdom. Stories often work better than trying to follow outlined theories or cause-and-effect dynamics. Truths that can be explained in a sentence or two are easily forgotten. Other truths are difficult to “put on,” to really become a part of our lives, to be *realized*, because we can't picture them. To understand, remember, and realize truth—to taste it, see it, smell it—is a different thing. This is what Jesus wanted for us: to absorb truth as fully as possible.

This is the goal of *The Scandal of the Kingdom Workbook*—to help you explore and experience the truths from Dallas Willard's book. It has been said that people don't really learn from experience but from *reflecting on experience*. Using this workbook will set the table for you to sit down, feast on that experience, and consider what it means to you. In that process, you are likely to hear God. So, some exercises ask you to pause and reflect—please don't skip them. If you do, you will miss out on some high-end opportunities to hear God.

If you haven't yet read *The Scandal of the Kingdom*, you will still be fine using the workbook. It was designed to stand alone. It shares the book's outline, central ideas, and some of its text, but practical ideas have been added as well as questions, reminders of key terms, and suggestions for further reading. If you have read the book, using the workbook will give you some added insight to ponder and added time to reflect—to experience Jesus.

— JAN JOHNSON

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook may be used by individuals or groups. If you use it as an individual, please don't approach it with the mindset of "getting through" the content. Go at the pace that Jesus takes you. Often, a passage you read the day before or last week will continue to resonate with you. You may even wake in the middle of the night thinking about it. Don't ignore this! Get out your workbook and scribble more notes in it. Then enter into a conversation with God about it.

If you're using this workbook in a group setting, pay attention to the answers that other people give. Group learning will allow Jesus to speak to you through other people—even those in the group who annoy you or whose life with God you question. What the other person says might complete your thought. In the group time, be respectful of the "pause" questions and allow for the awkward silence to become a holy silence. (If a group member falls asleep during the silence, bless them.) Then share with the group whatever is appropriate for you to share.

Also, be respectful of others as they share, not only because they are made in the image of God but also because the Holy Spirit might see these other people in your group as the best way to get through to you! (See the group guidelines below.) If fifteen sessions are too many for you to go through together as a group, you might want to shorten it to eight by choosing which lessons/parables you especially want to study. You might consider these eight:

- **Lesson 2:** How Jesus Taught (Matthew 13:11–15)
- **Lesson 3:** Why Parables? (Matthew 13:4–19)
- **Lesson 6:** Growing Together in the Kingdom (Matthew 13:24–30; 37–43)
- **Lesson 9:** Lost and Found (Luke 15:11–32)
- **Lesson 11:** The Miracle of Forgiveness (Matthew 18:21–35)
- **Lesson 12:** The Outrageous Compassion of God (Matthew 20:1–16)

- **Lesson 13:** What Is Your Life? (Luke 12:16–21)
- **Lesson 15:** Moved by Compassion (Luke 10:30–37)

As you work through the content, keep the following group guidelines in mind.

- **Be an active listener:** Listen without trying to figure out what someone is going to say (mind reading). Do not talk to others (cross talk) while someone else is sharing. *“To answer before listening—that is folly and shame”* (Proverbs 18:13).
- **Talk about your own issues:** Use “I” statements such as, “I think . . . I feel . . .” Discuss areas where *you* need to change, not where you feel *others* need to change. *“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone”* (Colossians 4:6).
- **Accept where others are in their journey:** Don’t try to “fix” people’s problems, and don’t give advice to others unless it is requested. Accept others where they are and don’t take lightly anyone else’s feelings. Don’t criticize, condemn, or look down on others. Allow others to cry if they need to do so. *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you”* (Romans 15:7).
- **Always maintain confidentiality:** Do not allow gossip—what is said in the group . . . stays in the group. Exercise care with what people share and confidentiality in prayer and prayer requests. *“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret”* (Proverbs 11:13).
- **Practice and encourage honesty and openness:** Be as honest and vulnerable as the safety level of the group allows. Avoid presenting an image of looking “okay” and “having it all together.” *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- **Take ownership of your own life and growth:** Your journey is your responsibility. You cannot change others, but you can change yourself. *“For each one should carry their own load”* (Galatians 6:5).

Our gracious FATHER, HOLY SPIRIT,
Lord JESUS, we are so thankful for the
opportunity to explore what you have said about
your KINGDOM through these beautiful stories.
We pray that you will take them and bless
them by your SPIRIT in the POWER of a
constant relationship of communication, guidance,
love, and service. Plant the SEED of your living
WORD deep within us so that our hearing of
it may be PROFITABLE to the upbuilding of
our soul and to the advancement of your
KINGDOM that is available to us all. Help us
to receive the grace we need each day to SEE clearly
and to HEAR the WORD of the KINGDOM—
to the very foundation of our lives.

DALLAS WILLARD



LESSON 1

THE FAITH OF CHRIST

(Mark 4:35-41)

The kingdom of God is now available.

DALLAS WILLARD

As a young minister studying the Bible, Dallas Willard realized something different was going on in the churches around him compared to what went on in the life and ministry of Jesus. The difference was simple: While Jesus hid from people at times, *they* spent thousands of dollars and exhausted themselves trying to get people to come to church. While Jesus said, “Don’t let anyone know I did this,” *they* begged, cajoled, and pleaded with people to come to church. In spite of Jesus’ secrecy, crowds flocked to hear him and were astounded by his life and message.

Dallas found, in his study of the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles, that a substitution had been made. Christians were meant not only to have faith *in* Christ but also to grow to have the faith *of* Christ. To have faith *in* Christ means believing

that Jesus is the Son of God; to have the faith *of* Christ means to have the same kind of faith in God that Jesus himself had. To have the faith *of* Christ means having the same confidence that Jesus himself had, which led him to do the things he did—teaching, healing, giving himself to others so completely.

We put our faith *in* Jesus so that we might receive the faith *of* Jesus.

Merely having faith *in* Christ leaves Christ *outside* the believer's personality. This exterior notion of Christ's faith and love are not strong enough to generate the confident statement, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith *of* the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20 KJV, emphasis added).¹

Believing *in* Christ is a place to start, but as we grow, we are to take the faith Christ had into ourselves, which then radiates throughout every dimension of who we are.² But is this really possible? Agnes Sanford, a writer, Bible teacher, and respected facilitator of healing, wrote of an insight she gained about this when she and a friend were staying at the beach in Tiburon, California. A tremendous wind kept shaking the picture window in front of them. She finally shouted, "Okay, that's enough! Quiet down." Agnes wrote, "Suddenly, the wind was still. I cannot explain this! It happened, that's all."³ This was the faith *of* Christ.

1. What were some of Jesus' miracles that showed his faith (the faith *of* Christ)?

2. Faith is a gift, a seed, to be received, planted, and nurtured. Our faith *in* Christ is a part of, and the *entryway* into, having the faith *of* Christ. In what area of your life would you like to see your faith grow?

Hearing What Jesus Said

To illustrate the difference between having faith *in* Christ and having the faith *of* Christ, consider the following scene on a boat on the Sea of Galilee.

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion (Mark 4:35–38).

The fact that Jesus could lie down in the middle of a storm and go to sleep is a glimpse of what the faith *of* Christ was like.

The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mark 4:38–41).

The disciples showed their faith *in* Christ by waking him and crying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” (Matthew 8:25 NKJV), even though they had not yet seen Jesus interact with nature by calming a storm or feeding a crowd.⁴ They relied on him to *do something* in the storm. They had great faith in him, but they did not yet have his great faith in God.⁵ They did not have the faith *of* Christ, which would have been strong enough to fend off all fear. To attain the degree of Jesus’ faith, they had to enter into the kind of life Jesus had, which was to come.

Jesus’ faith was such that he relied on the power of his Father to stop the wind and still the sea just by speaking to it: “Peace! Be still!” This is the faith into which we can grow.

Then, in kindness, Jesus turned to them in their fear, addressing them in that familiar way: “O you of little faith” (Matthew 8:26 ESV). Some people see this as scolding, but elsewhere in the Gospels we see that Jesus had a high opinion of “little faith,” saying that faith as small as a mustard seed could move mountains (see Matthew 17:20).

3. Try to imagine Jesus speaking to the wind in a severely rocking boat. In what ways do you admire Jesus—perhaps in his desires, actions, and abilities?

4. In what circumstances would you like the “faith of Christ” (as he had in the boat) to be true of you? For example, what personal storms (such as rejection or failure) would you like to be empowered to calm in yourself or others?

Thinking About What Jesus Said

The Message of Christ: The Kingdom of God

The idea that you can have the faith *of* Christ might seem overwhelming. Can you *really* have a life with God to the extent you trust him—and act in the same kind of faith in him—as Jesus did? You are more likely to grow to this point as you understand that you can live in the everlasting kingdom of God here and now. It’s not off in the future. It is present *right now*.

Dallas Willard noticed this other “substitution” as he studied the Bible to see why today’s churches are not as effective as the church was in Acts. He saw that people were being taught a message *about* Christ (who he was and what he did) instead of the message *of* Christ (the one that Jesus himself preached).

What did Jesus preach, exactly? Dallas saw clearly in his study of Jesus’ sermons that his message was about the kingdom of God and how it was available to everyone with his arrival. It had always existed in the past (see Psalm 145:13), but when Jesus came, he brought it more fully. It will come in even greater power and glory when he returns.

Here is what Jesus said: “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17 KJV; see also Matthew 3:2; 10:7; Mark 1:15). Many people think this means that we should *feel sorry for our sins because the kingdom of God is coming some day*. But when Jesus said

the kingdom was “at hand,” he meant it the same way that someone today might extend his or her hand toward the dining room and say to a guest, “Here’s the dining room.” Jesus was telling his listeners that the kingdom of God was present among them in his own self (see Matthew 4:17).

When Jesus said to people that they needed to repent, he was telling them to reconsider how they had been approaching their lives now that they could live in his presence and take his life into their own. They could embrace the abundant kingdom with a clear-eyed vision of a totally good and competent God who was right there looking after them.

5. Notice the kingdom of God is described as *abundant*, *available*, and *accessible* and that we can live with a *clear-eyed vision of a good and competent God who is looking after us*. Which of these descriptions is most interesting to you? Why?
6. Consider the following views of repentance: “feeling sorry for sin” and “reconsidering how they had been approaching their life now that they could live in the presence of Jesus.” How is a person affected differently by each view?

The Presence of Christ: The Kingdom of God

When the Pharisees once asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, Christ replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20–21). Jesus was teaching them that the kingdom of God was not an institution or building they could see but was Jesus

himself “in their midst.” As people looked at him and listened to him, they saw the kingdom and its availability *in him*.

What is the kingdom of God? It’s the range of God’s effective will. It exists wherever what God *wants* done is *actually* done. It is simply God acting in this world: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10 KJV). Jesus put a face on the kingdom of God.

What does it mean that the kingdom of God is available to us here and now? The author of Hebrews provided the following encouragement to people who had endured trial and hardship: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28). In our everyday existence, we live in the invisible but invincible and unshakable kingdom of God. Even in our worst moments, we have the strong presence of Christ holding us up. In the kingdom, God can redeem our worst moments so that what seems like the last thing we would want to happen moves to first place as a pivotal moment for which we can be thankful. (Give it time, though!)

As we live in the kingdom, our actions and the words we use to bless others or overcome evil are filled with God’s power. In those moments, we are partnering with God to impart renewed life to others. This happens as we teach the kingdom of God through Jesus’ life and wisdom, especially his parables specifically about the kingdom of God.

All that is required to usher us into the kingdom of God is the sincere willingness of our hearts to follow Christ by the grace and power of God. As we learn how to live fully in the kingdom of God in the here and now, we become his disciples and friends (see John 15:15), working and living out of kingdom resources.

7. When have you experienced the kingdom of God—that is, you saw something done that you knew was the kind of thing God wants people to do here on earth?

8. What might it look like for you to be “working and living out of kingdom resources”? Think big!

Understanding Kingdom Language

A human kingdom is a society led by a king or queen who serves the good of the people by providing them with care, protection, and service. The kingdom of God is exactly like that. The Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—loves us and works for our good. While citizens of a human kingdom offer loyalty, service, and respect to their monarch, we offer our love, worship, and obedience to God. One of the many differences is that human government generally rules by using force, deception, brutality, and the threat of punishment (sometimes including the death penalty). Human government lacks the power of life, which is what the kingdom of God specializes in—leading us to “life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19).

The kingdom of God is not like any human government. It is from everlasting to everlasting; it cannot be shaken and is totally good (see Psalm 145:13; Daniel 7:14; Hebrews 12:28). It has never been in trouble and never will be.⁶ Jesus’ teaching reveals to us that the kingdom of God is not a thing of time and place but is a thing of the heart. It is a life that is lived in vital connection with God himself.

We are invited to bring our life into the eternal life of God in his everlasting kingdom, being mindful that eternity is already in progress and is not something that will start later. In fact, the only biblical definition of eternal life is this: “That they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3 NKJV). The phrase “know you” is an *interactive* and *experiential* relationship, and everything that we bring into that relationship becomes eternal. In that way, we live an eternal kind of life here and now.

When we live in the kingdom of God by the Spirit of God, our lives overflow with goodness and mercy. We are not the ones who make this happen. It is a gift from God; we merely receive it. It moves far beyond what we eat and drink and plunges us into righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, which is not humanly possible (see Romans 14:17). The best advice about how to go to heaven is *to go now* by living your life with God.

9. How do you respond to the idea that God wants you to have a life of interacting with him—one that is relational and experiential—rather than just having head knowledge about him? What would it look like for you to have that kind of life with God?

10. In what shaky life circumstances (unstable relationships, beginning a new adventure, uncertain future) do you need to immerse yourself in the truth that you “are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28)? Be specific.

Responding to What Jesus Said

An Open Invitation to Everyone

You may be surprised to learn that you can grow into having the faith of Christ and are living in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God right now. It is easy to think of yourself (or someone else) as not being *qualified* to have and do these things. Jesus knew this and went out of his way to stress the openness of the kingdom and the ease with which anyone could enter.

We see this “anyone factor” in the story of a leper who came to Jesus and asked to be healed. Lepers were not supposed to be *coming toward* people. They were required to *move away* from people. Jesus violated the protocols for leprosy in even talking with a leper. Yet this diseased man, who was supposed to stay away from people, had heard Jesus teach. So he came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” The leper was prepared to be rejected, because he had undoubtedly experienced a lot of rejection. So, he said, “If you are willing . . .” Jesus answered, “I *am* willing” (Matthew 8:2–3, emphasis added). Jesus’ disregard of common custom was unheard of in the eyes of people in that day.

This kind of radical acceptance and interaction with others reinforced the message that Jesus preached about the present availability of the kingdom of God to all. Nothing that you ever have done nor any opinions that others have formed about you disqualifies you from growing into the faith *of* Christ, from living in the kingdom of God here and now, or from having an interactive and experiential relationship with God. You were built for these things, and God is eager for you to join in this kind of life.

11. How would you describe Jesus' personality and behavior in his encounter with the leper? Is there anything there you admire? Explain your response.
12. Write down three actions taken or words spoken that would seem to disqualify a person from entrance into God's kingdom. Pause after each and say, "Everyone is welcome in the kingdom of God."

Key Terms

Kingdom of God: The range of God's effective will; anyplace where what God wants done actually gets done.

Eternal life / eternal living: Knowing the only true God and his Son as an interactive, experiential relationship resulting in a life caught up in the life of God (see John 17:3).

Faith of Christ: The kind of faith that Christ possessed that enabled him to teach as he taught and do as he did (see Galatians 2:20).

For Further Reading

Dallas Willard, “Flesh and Spirit,” chapter 3 in *Renewing the Christian Mind: Essays, Interviews, and Talks* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), on the faith of Christ.

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), chapter 4, on what is the gospel.

John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980).

George Eldon Ladd, “What Is the Kingdom of God?,” chapter 1 in *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959).

Notes

1. Some translations say “faith in Christ.” This is a controversial issue among translators. Some recent versions say “the faithfulness of Christ.” Other translations that state “faith of Christ/Son of God” include the Twenty-First Century King James Version, Jubilee Bible 2000, New Revised Standard Version: Updated Edition, and Young’s Literal Translation.
2. Adapted from Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Formation and the Warfare Between the Flesh and the Human Spirit,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 84. This article was reprinted in *Renewing the Christian Mind* (San Francisco: HarperOne Publishers, 2016), 62.
3. Agnes Sanford, *Sealed Orders* (Monroe, LA: Logos International, 1972), 308–309.
4. This event occurred well into Jesus’ second year of ministry before he walked on water or fed the group of five thousand.
5. Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Life with God* (Lisle, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 203.
6. Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 25.