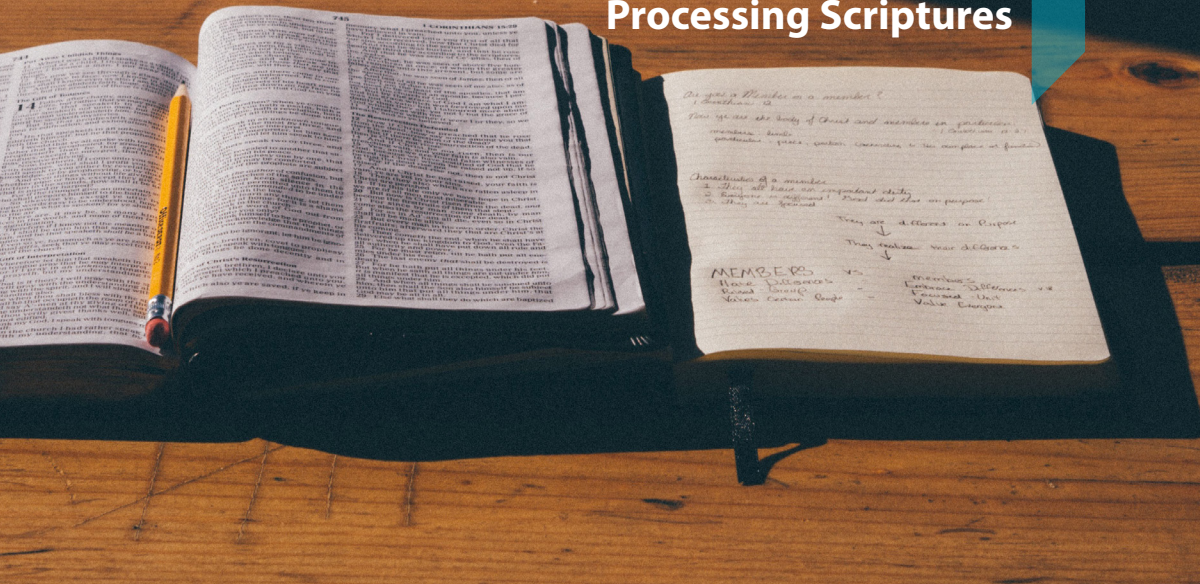




First Focus

The "4 R's" of Processing Scriptures



On Groups

Groups help people find their faith story in the Bible.

Hospitality in groups help open people up to God's voice. Focus on serving others and making them comfortable, not on simply having a good time. Greet everyone, not just people you already know. Make sure your environment is an inviting place, and pay attention to things like lighting, seating, and basic signage.

Enthusiasm is viral—if your group members show it, others will catch it. Hospitable groups and practices are necessary anchors to welcome and include new people in the life of the church. We know that we are most comfortable with people who look and act like ourselves, and that it is easiest to build community among groups of like-minded individuals.

But we also realize that the Kingdom of God will not be homogeneous; instead it will include **"a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands"** (Rev. 7:9). So, part of our challenge as Christians is to prepare ourselves for life in the kingdom by doing whatever we can **to build inclusive communities**, and we will do this best by following the style of hospitality practiced by Jesus Christ and observing His character in other image bearers that are different than us.

On Studying Scripture

*A simple and popular process to interpreting the Bible for yourself is **1. Observe, 2. Interpret, 3. Apply.** The key to remember is not to apply before we interpret and not to interpret until we observe. Whether you are looking at scripture in worship, group ministry or personal quiet time, this process is extremely helpful.*

Asking the right questions is the hardest part and often the most confusing. Ask yourself, "What do I see in text?," not in between the words, indirectly, or what possibly could be going on, but exactly what does it say. Only then can we ask what it means to the biblical audience and integrate it into the rest of scripture. Finally we apply it to our lives, by asking questions like "how does this work for me or others?" Application has practicality but also deconstruction, in which we break down elements. We should challenge ourselves to use this to help us better communicate truth to others.

Another memorable process to help us absorb scripture is **1. Read, 2. Record, 3. Reflect, 4. Recite.** Careful reading is holistic reading. Read slow, fast, out loud, and multiple times. You will be surprised at how simple yet helpful just reading carefully will be. Record your thoughts, the first thing you see, and your prayer associated with it. Journaling can be very fruitful, especially as time goes on and you are able to look back and see your spiritual mindset and prayer thought. Writing down your thought about scripture might at first seem redundant, but the Spirit works in the smallest of exercises.

The real discipline in reading and recording is listening. **Listen, listen, and then listen again.** Reflection is best suited after recording because recording helps your mind focus. The biggest enemy to reflection is the wondering of the mind. Stay on track by asking these questions. **"What's going on in this passage?" "What is it telling me about God?" "What about myself?" and "How does this fit in the story of redemption?"** It is even a good idea to highlight phrases in the text and simply reflect on its meaning. Remember you are not trying to come up with the right answers, but first asking the right questions and thoroughly considering the questions. The answers will come in time as they are not hidden per se, but we simply don't want to neglect the cautiousness of observation. Then we can reconstruct the passage and integrate it into the big picture and into our lives.

On Evangelism

It is the greatest demeanor in the world, "I'll have what he is having." This probably occurs most of the time when you are at restaurants. But the power is not so causal. Few if any human assets are as attractive as this particular demeanor when it is pure and undiluted. Those possessing it seldom comprehend its value. When you spot people exhibiting this mindset, you observe that something is quite different about them. Their demeanor is a great visualization of what brings them joy.

It is hard not to notice. They are not merely cheerful on the outside; but they are peaceful on the inside. Despite their circumstances, they actively appreciate their blessings and remain madly in love with life. Organically grown, this demeanor is established with a decision, nurtured with right thoughts, and time released to the world at large. It will be fiercely tested on the battlefield of life, but when fully developed, it cannot be taken away. What is this demeanor? I think you already know, don't you? No, not eating Krispy Kreme donuts, but joy!

Joy is the contagious fruit of divinely inspired growth. It arises from a deeply entrenched faith, the result of sustained right thinking and dwelling on those things that are lovely, admirable, pure, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). Philippians 2:4 connects the perfection of joy with Christ's mindset and love. Joy is an outward sign of inward faith in God's promises. It is a way of responding, and it is evidence of spiritual maturity. Joy is an expression

Scripture is full of references to joy. Psalm 90:14 makes clear that God's love brings us joy. In addition, joy is a gift from God that comes from trusting him. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 15:13, **"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"** Joy is not a distant destination at which you arrive; rather, it's a path you choose to travel each day. Joy is an enduring delight with life and the clear consequence of agreeing with God and behaving in accordance with scriptural truth.

Joy requires faith and confidence. It is a state of mind that must be intentionally cultivated if you are determined to live and love and influence others as God intended. **The foundation of our joy should be what God has done, is doing and will do in our lives.** Once we have confidence and correct Christ-like perspective concerning those three time frames of God's work, joy is expressed and shared through conversation, action and sharing. **The world wants what we are having.**

When we witness people having a really good time, our curiosity is activated. We want to know what their secret is, right? We might even want to emulate their approach. If we see someone who has lost a bunch of weight and now looks lean and healthy, we will probably want to know how he did it, especially if we also want to shed a few pounds too. When we see several kids with high character from the same family, we want to know what mom and dad did that produced such great results. Sharing joy does not mean that your life is perfect. Who could claim such a distinction? It doesn't even mean that your life is great. **It does mean you emphatically trust God and believe that He has great plans for your life, regardless of what is happening presently.**

Sharing the joy
of what God has
done in your life.



Ongoing resources Recommended Apps for Discipleship

- 1 YOUVERSION BIBLE APP**
This app has every version you can imagine and wonderful devotional and reading plans with ways to remind yourself. Plus, with events it is what we use to keep notes of Sunday sermons.
- 2 BIBLE APP FOR KIDS**
Interactive stories with great summation of biblical themes. 3-6 yr olds will benefit the most using it.
- 3 RIGHTNOW MEDIA**
The Netflix of Bible Studies. It has a mobile app that is useful and simple. Contact Pastor Andy for email invitation for you to create a username and password.
- 4 VERSES**
This is a scripture memorization app that has different games and tools to make memorization more interesting. It has daily reminders and tracks your progress.
- 5 LEAD SMALL**
A great tool for our Student and Children Sunday School leaders. Articles, tips and different tools for your journey.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

"Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture in a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Abortion, Persecution, Orphans, and Pornography" by David Platt. (2015)

"Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters" by N. T. Wright (2011)

"Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God" By Timothy Keller (2014)



On Leadership

Leaders equip others to develop convictions

What a person values is very unique to them. As leaders, we influence people to a value. Through community, there has to be a process to develop specific values. Leaders must strive to help people shape their convictions via prayer, scripture and group conversation. Albert Mohler believes the ability to lead people relies on a group leader's capacity to develop and deploy self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Many of the world's most intelligent people lack the emotional and empathetic skills necessary for effective leadership. Do not let this be discouraging but liberating because this reveals our complexity and the variances in gifting. Everyone has a part to play.

Many modern psychologists have helped popularize the notion of multiple "intelligences." For example, some have musical intelligence, others logical intelligence, or maybe linguistic intelligence yet are all unique in certain respects. This is huge in group ministry! There is not merely one form of intelligence; there are several. We should reject a one-dimensional view of how

to reach people's minds. If the only thing that mattered to your success was what you knew and your ability to use that knowledge, then only the intellectuals would be the successful ones. But that is not always the case. Think about Albert Einstein. He was a genius, but not necessarily a strong leader. Many of the most intelligent people in the world lack the emotional and empathetic skills necessary for effective leadership. **We believe that not only all people are leaders, but also that everyone has gifting in order to lead the group forward towards what God has in store.**

This "convictional" intelligence is the result of learning the Christian faith, submitting to biblical truth, and exploring how to think like a Christian. **They have a gut instinct shaped by the Holy Spirit.** They are leaders who can discern the values of Christ and the perspective of the Spirit on the fly and live it out with clarity. This begins with knowledge but that's only the beginning. Knowledge must be accompanied by other commitments and capacities. Charisma is a great gift, but it cannot be an alternate for this

"convictional" intelligence. The same is true of personality skills, gifts of communication, and organizational ability. Christian leaders must develop and operate out of an additional intelligence—a Spirit-led "convictional" intelligence. Leaders without emotional intelligence cannot lead effectively because they cannot connect with the people they are trying to lead. "Convictional" intelligence rises when the leader increases in knowledge and faith. It deepens over time with the seasoning and maturing of knowledge that grows out of faithful life learning, Christ-centered thinking, and biblical reasoning. Group ministry is the kitchen for these recipes to come together.

Christians are not called to grow into faithfulness alone. The Christian life is to be lived within the fellowship and accountability of a local congregation, where the Word is rightly preached and believers mature together. In that context "convictional" intelligence emerges naturally, along with those Christian intellectual habits, reflexes, and intuitions we desperately need.

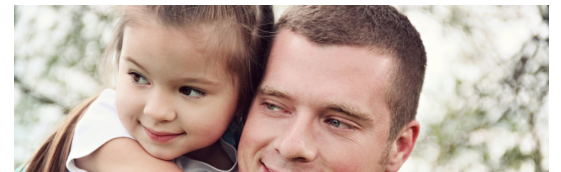
On Parenting

Allowing room for failure.

Learning cause and effect through success and failure is part of a necessary maturing process. Intervening can interrupt that process. Kids can't become responsible adults without some failure. We do our children a disservice when we cover for them or alleviate the consequences of their choices. Kids never learn how to cope with life when parents do all the coping for them. They enter adulthood without the confidence that they'll be able to handle whatever comes their way. To make it in this world, kids need to know how to struggle. They need to learn how to persevere

for a hard-fought victory and how to handle disappointment when victory doesn't come. **They need to understand that they reap what they sow.** They'll have to experience a lot of bumps and bruises, and some will be self-inflicted, and some imposed on them by a sinful world, but all of their wounds become a lifelong lesson. We simply need to instill values and provide guardrails to their journey. Think about your own personality and how that might affect your parenting. We are all making adjustments continually. You are laying a foundation, it takes a true visionary

to see the completed product while working on the ground level foundation. The hope of every parent is to have children who are responsible, self-dependent concerned members of community. **Parenting is a skill that takes effort, adjusting, and patience.** Just like in our own lives, when we make mistakes God can oversee and redeem the process. When we as parents make a mistake we need to admit it and ask for God's help and our child's forgiveness. We don't have to do this job alone—God and His Church are active in the process.



Questions for Discussion & Reflection

On Studying Scripture

1. Read 1 John 4:9-10. How does this motivate you to get to know the God behind this message through reading the Bible?
2. Pick any passage in Bible and read. What stood out to you? Who are the characters? What's happening? How did things begin/end? Were there any statements made?
3. How does this magnify the gospel? What do we learn about the character of God and man? What do we learn about Christ? How should we respond to Christ?
4. How does this show me more of the gospel? How do these truths apply to my attitude and my actions?
5. Have you ever considered having a disciplined process of reading the Bible? Why? Or why not?

On Groups

1. In scripture, what happens when Jesus welcomes and includes people?
2. At first glance, which of the best hospitality practices is most important to you? Why?
3. When do groups fall into "religion clubs," and how can they get out?
4. Do you remember when you were first involved in a group that helped you see your faith story in the Bible?

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
Galatians 2:20 ESV

On Leadership

1. Have you ever considered how your beliefs evolved? How does this awareness serve you and others in group ministry?
2. If you have participated in a group that has shaped your convictions, how has the group helped you love God better?
3. Martin Luther said that **"whatever we give our hearts to, whatever we treasure most, whatever we center in, that is our god."** If a stranger looked at each of our lives (as well as our groups), what would that person see as our gods?
4. On a scale from 1-10, how much confidence do you have in your capacity to lead from your unique strengths and intelligence?

On Evangelism

1. Ask if someone in your group feels comfort in describing some less-than-joyous recent moments.
2. Ask if someone would describe a few moments where you clearly shared joy with the people in your life.
3. Take time to write down a few ideas for improving in this area over the next month or so.
4. With your friends, do your words and deeds reflect your faith and the joy that Christ has revealed to you?
5. If married, do your conversations with and about your spouse demonstrate **expectation** of an awesome future together?
6. As a parent, are your kids likely to live with joy if they model your habits of speech and interaction with others?
7. When was the last time someone, out of curiosity, asked you about your faith?

Prayer

Lord, you have put joy in the core of my being, may I take refuge in this well of peace and blessings! In your presence is the fullness of Joy, may I abide there throughout my days and become fully aware of your desires to share this joy with everyone in small and big ways. I submit my expectations to you and I am confident that you will bring great things into fruition.

On Parenting

1. Discuss with your group how you feel when your child fails.
2. Read **2 Corinthians 9:6 & Galatians 6:7-9**. Do you find these passages encouraging when considering parenting? If so why?
3. How well do you think your children are understanding and embracing the truth found in these passages?
4. What changes can you make in your attitude in order to find comfort and encouragement in these passages?
5. Write down the specific values that you wish to "sow" in the lives of your children.
6. What are some ways that you can plant gospel-centered seeds in the lives of your children?