

LISTENING GUIDE:

Using Scripture in Community of Christ

Barbara Carter

Materials

- DVD worksheet
- Glossary of Terms
- Copy of Doctrine and Covenants 163:7
- “Scripture in Community of Christ” (scripture statement)
- Script of DVD presentation
- Discussion Questions

DVD Worksheet Questions

1. How is the use of scripture unique in Community of Christ as compared to other faith communities?
use of Bible, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants
2. In Community of Christ we seek to understand scripture in light of the ___ **Christ event** ____.
3. Scripture is an _ **indispensable witness** _ of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church.
4. According to the speaker, what two questions should we apply when using and interpreting scripture?
 - a. **Do these understandings reflect the life of Jesus?**
 - b. **Is this truly what Jesus would do?**
5. Rate your own understanding and interpretation on this continuum. Place an X on your position.

|-----|

<i>Scripture is the Living Word, written by the hand of God</i>	<i>Scripture is about the Living Word, written by human witnesses about their encounters with God</i>
---	---

6. Our understanding of ___**scripture**___ is shaped by our faith, tradition, experience, and scholarship.

7. The ultimate standard for God's revelation in scripture is _____ **Jesus Christ** _____.
8. Barbara Carter states that "We have the promise that the Holy Spirit will guide Jesus' disciples into *new truth*. (italics added) What is meant by the phrase "new truth"?
--No right answer, just a matter of personal response--
9. Why do we include the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants as part of our canon?
because they confirm the message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word

Glossary of Terms

Hermeneutics: the rules one uses for searching out the meanings of writings, particularly of scriptural texts (used in the outline)

Canon: The books of scripture constituted by the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and considered authoritative in the larger Christian church.

Proof-text: the practice of using quotations from a document to establish a proposition. Critics of the technique note that often a document quoted in such a manner, when read as a whole, may not in fact support the proposition for which it was cited.

From Wikipedia this example:

A man dissatisfied with his life decided to consult the Bible for guidance. Closing his eyes, he flipped the book open and pointed to a spot on the page. Opening his eyes, he read the verse under his finger. It read, "Then Judas went away and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5b). Closing his eyes again, the man randomly selected another verse. This one read, "Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise'" (Luke 10:37b).

Doctrine and Covenants 163:7

- a. Scripture is an indispensable witness to the Eternal Source of light and truth, which cannot be fully contained in any finite vessel or language. Scripture has been written and shaped by human authors through experiences of revelation and ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the midst of time and culture.
- b. Scripture is not to be worshiped or idolized. Only God, the Eternal One of whom scripture testifies, is worthy of worship. God's nature, as revealed in Jesus Christ and affirmed by the Holy Spirit, provides the ultimate standard by which any portion of scripture should be interpreted and applied.
- c. It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings. Much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God's beloved

children through the misuse of scripture. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices.

d. Scripture, prophetic guidance, knowledge, and discernment in the faith community must walk hand in hand to reveal the true will of God. Follow this pathway, which is the way of the Living Christ, and you will discover more than sufficient light for the journey ahead.

Scripture in Community of Christ

Preamble

Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ. Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.

Affirmation One

We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).

Affirmation Two

We find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is the indispensable witness of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. The church formed the canon of scripture so that it might always have a way to hear the good news, nurture its faith, measure its life, test its experience, and remember its identity.

Affirmation Three

Scripture is a library of books that speaks in many voices. These books were written in diverse times and places, and reflect the languages, cultures, and conditions under which they were written. God's revelation through scripture does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers, but in and through that humanity. In the earthen vessels of scripture we have been given the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Affirmation Four

Scripture's authority is derived from the model of Christ, who came to be a servant (Mark 10:45). Therefore, the authority of scripture is not the authority to oppress, control, or dominate. If Jesus came to serve, how much more should the books that point to him be treated as a servant of the saving purposes of God.

Affirmation Five

Scripture is vital and essential to the church, but not because it is inerrant (in the sense that every detail is historically or scientifically correct). Scripture makes no such claim for itself. Rather, generations of Christians have found scripture simply to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, in promoting faith in Christ, and in nurturing the life of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Affirmation Six

Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture. In wrestling to hear and respond to the witness of scripture, the church must value the light that each of these sources may offer.

Affirmation Seven

As the church tries to interpret scripture responsibly, it seeks the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide his disciples into new truth (John 16:12–15). By the Spirit, the ancient words of scripture can become revelatory, allowing us to grasp what may not have been seen or heard before.

Affirmation Eight

Disciples are called to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures so that they may ever increase in love for God, neighbor, and self (Matthew 22:37–40; Mosiah 1:49), uphold the dignity and worth of all persons (Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c–d), and faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ.

Affirmation Nine

With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, the Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God (Preface of the Book of Mormon; Doctrine and Covenants 76:3g). We have heard Christ speak in all three books of scripture, and bear witness that he is “alive forever and ever” (Revelation 1:18).

For our time we shall seek to live and interpret the witness of scripture *by* the Spirit, *with* the community, *for the sake of* mission, *in the name of* the Prince of Peace.

Questions for individual and group reflection and discussion about this statement can be found at www.CofChrist.org/ourfaith/scripture.asp

Draft Script: Using Scripture in Community of Christ

Hi! I am Barbara Carter. I am a full time minister in the Community of Christ serving the church in the Northeast Field. It is my pleasure to be with you today as we explore “Using scripture in the Community of Christ”.

President Veazey has shared with us a model or approach we use in the Community of Christ to seek understanding of God’s purposes for the church. Six lenses were identified including scripture which is the primary focus of this DVD resource. Why do we need to give special attention to the understanding and use of scripture? Are not all of the lenses for seeking God valuable? Of course they are. However, from the beginning of the restoration movement we have held a unique belief that scripture is alive and continually being

revealed and interpreted. We hold continuing revelation as an enduring principle of our faith that finds expression in scripture, our lives and in the world. The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and The Holy Scriptures, Inspired Version are tangible expressions that using scripture in the Community of Christ is unique.

The Community of Christ Statement on Scripture identifies nine affirmations that help us use scripture faithfully. Let's take a look at these affirmations.

First. We declare that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God! It is to Christ that scripture points. This does not mean that every writing in the scriptures is about Jesus rather it means that we seek to understand scripture in light of the Christ event. We do not worship scripture, or idolize it. It is sacred, and we cherish it because it helps us know who Jesus is. Scripture expands our understanding of others who chose to be followers of the way and allows us to see God through their eyes. What a wonderful legacy the poets of the Psalms left us. Just think what we would be missing if we didn't have Psalm 100.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into the LORD's presence with singing.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is the LORD that made us, and to the LORD we belong;
we are the LORD's people, and the sheep of the LORD's pasture.

When we spend time in the scriptures, we can find a fuller expression of the Christ, the Living Word.

The second affirmation recognizes that that we find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is an **indispensable witness** of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. In section 163:7a of the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

Scripture is an indispensable witness to the Eternal Source of light and truth, which cannot be fully contained in any finite vessel or language.

What does indispensable witness mean? It is the witness of God moving, touching, inspiring, and being with people through the ages. It is the witness of the response of the people to God's merciful love in their life. We have this wonderful gift that shares the stories of humanity struggling to be faithful in their response to God's love. The church has taken the stories, experiences, and history and formed the canon of scripture, so that we, you and I, are reminded of God's love for all of humanity. Scripture provides us with memory that helps shape and preserve our identity and calling. As Community of Christ we acknowledge our canon as open to new understandings of God's purposes. This calls every generation of believers to be engaged in listening to God's direction.

Third, scripture is not one book, but many books. It is not one voice, it is many voices. It does not represent one culture, but many cultures. It is not set in one time and place, but many. It was not written in one language, but in several languages. The Bible has been written and rewritten. Biblical Scholar Bart D. Ehrman, reminds us candidly:

We don't have the first copies of the originals. We don't have the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later---much later. In most instances, they are copies made centuries later. And these copies all differ from one another...there are more differences among our

manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament. – Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 10.

Clearly there are some accidental errors in the transmission of the ancient text. However, some changes were intentional reflecting new points of emphasis or understanding. This was the experience of Joseph Smith in the shaping of scripture in the early restoration movement. This does not demean or negate the value or sacredness of scripture. God's revelation does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers and story tellers, but in and through that humanity. God does not allow us glimpses of who God is in sterile environments void of humanity. It is in our humanness that we glimpse God. Later in this resource we will explore this understanding in the study of the slave laws found in the Torah (our first five books of the Old Testament).

Fourth. Scripture's authority is derived from the model of Christ. This authority rests in a simple understanding of Christ as servant – God's message of love and redemption for the world. When we use scripture, we should ask ourselves: Do these understandings reflect the life of Christ? Is this truly what Jesus would do? Recent counsel to the church reminds us:

It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings. Much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God's beloved children through the misuse of scripture. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices. – D&C 163:7c

One of my first experiences with scriptural memorization happened when I was eight years old. It was a lively discussion (can eight year olds have lively discussions?) with a friend about which church was right. This discussion was occurring while swinging from rung to rung on the monkey bars during recess. I was quoting scripture, as was she. Neither of us convinced the other of our point of view. We both just ended up in a mud puddle under the bars. What is really interesting is I learned later that what I was quoting as scripture was actually words from a hymn in the Children's hymnal. Neither my words, or actions pointed to the life of Christ; they were not intended to bring reconciliation to the world (in this case my friendship), nor express the love of God. Instead they were spoken in an attempt to make me look and feel right.

We live in a time when much gain is to be made when we are separated from each other. When our differences are exposed and exploited and we are urged to distrust and fear each other. Scriptures have been used for this purpose. Much personal pain and hurt is the result. The pain and hurt does not end with the intended victims, but it continues into the heart of faith communities that struggle to right themselves with the scriptures that testify of God's love. The Community of Christ stands resolved that scripture can never be used to oppress, control, or dominate others. Rather scripture is to be applied in a manner that affirms the model of Jesus' life and ministry.

Fifth. Scripture is vital and essential to the church. Generations of Christians have found it to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, promoting faith in Christ and in nurturing their journey of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable. This does not mean, however, that scripture is inerrant or infallible. While scriptural infallibility is accepted in some pockets of Christianity, it is not the experience of the restoration movement and not a belief of the Community of Christ. Former President Joseph Smith III reminded us early in our movement that nothing passing through human hands can be infallible. Former member of the First Presidency, F. Henry Edwards reiterates this same understanding and provides interesting insight on why biblical infallibility garners attention:

It is because our natural spiritual inertia has thus led us to seek a standard rather than a guide, that a theory of revelation has grown up which regards the Bible as the infallible and final revelation of the will of God. This theory is not true to experience, nor to the claims of the divine word itself. – *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, Herald House, 1958, page 10.

Sixth. Our faith, experiences, traditions, and scholarship contribute to our understanding of scripture. We recognize the importance of these elements in other facets of our life and recognize equally their importance in the study of scripture. Everything we read, whether scripture, newspapers, or books is shaped by our personal and corporate faith, experiences, traditions and learning. This is not to say that what we learn or gain from our studies is predetermined, it is not, as long as we recognize those influences and examine them in context with what our understanding is.

For example: If one were to pick up a copy of the New Testament and begin reading it without the knowledge that it is a collection of books, they may soon be confused. Most of you have a learned understanding of how the New Testament was created: a collection of books including the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline and other epistles, and Revelation. So you approach the New Testament with that understanding and your experience is richer than one who didn't know.

Seventh. We seek the influence of the Holy Spirit in interpreting scripture responsibly. Former Apostle Geoff Spencer reminds of the importance of responsible scriptural interpretation:

“Responsible guidelines for interpretation are necessary. The ‘Word of God’ has too often been invoked to support or justify interpretations that have become an embarrassment or an offence. – *Hazards of Theology*, pg. 93-94.

Examples of erroneous interpretations from Christian history, just to name a few, include: male dominance (patriarchy), white supremacy (racism), celibacy, polygamy, slavery, violence and killing in God's name, abuse of natural resources, and withholding needed medical services. The church, as a faith community, takes seriously its' call to understand and interpret scripture responsibly and it does this by seeking the help of the Holy Spirit. This is vitally important as we learn to be together on our journey of discipleship. Can we learn to search for understanding together? Can we risk opening ourselves up to the impress of the Holy Spirit so that all of God's creation can be blessed? We have the promise that the Spirit would guide Jesus' disciples into new truth. I pray that we have the courage to hear and respond.

God's nature, as revealed in Jesus Christ and affirmed by the Holy Spirit, provides the ultimate standard by which any portion of scripture should be interpreted and applied. – D&C 163:7b

Eight. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to grow in our knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. This is so we can assist in bringing reconciliation and healing to God's people and creation.

Former Presiding Evangelist Danny Belrose poetically describes our need:

“INK ON A PAGE”

Ink on a page. Holy ink. Holy pages. Holy books.
Hard-cover gods filled with insights,
wisdom, and wonder.
Proof-text permissions (Christian and non-Christian)

that deny and destroy.
It's all there in several versions
---birth, death, demons, and deity
---onion-skin-thin, fueling faith and fancy.
It's a tight fit, God.
We've squeezed you into chapters and verses.
We've made you in our own image,
put our words in your mouth
and used them for love and war.
Open our eyes, our ears, our minds, and hearts, O God,
to the rhythm of your Spirit,
which beats beyond words on a page.
Free us from lethal literalism.
Let sacred texts point the way, not "be" the way.
Let them serve, not "be" served.
Let them unite, not divide.
Let them, once again, be a lamp unto our feet,
not a hammer in our hands.
– *Vulnerable to Grace* (Community of Christ, 2008) p.71.

Ninth. Finally, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition we use the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We use these books because they confirm the message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God. All scripture in the Community of Christ speak to us from the past: A past that includes the story of struggle and celebration, pain and healing, brokenness and reconciliation. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, scripture does not remain in the past. It continues with us into the future. In deed, we become part of the story. Just as those who went before us inform us of their experience with God, we too write new chapters of how God has formed us and offer it in humility to those yet to come.

As we travel together, my prayer is that our lives become new pages of scripture that bear witness of Jesus Christ, the Living Word.

Discussion Questions

1. How are you feeling at this point?
2. What are your reactions to what you are hearing?
3. How does your experience with scripture compare to the affirmations in the statement on scripture?
4. How have you discovered Christ "in and through scripture"?
5. How do you see the relationship between scripture's cultural and historical context and the guidance to responsibly interpret and faithfully apply scripture?" How does recognition of the role of the human writer affect how you view scripture in your own life and in the life of the church?
6. What values do you find in both the unity and diversity of the scriptural witness?

7. Consider the preamble. How do you define the phrases “responsibly interpreted” and “faithfully applied”? How does your approach to scripture align with these two criteria? What might need to have more attention in order to be better aligned?