



Processing with Purpose

Faith-Based Emotional Processing Strategies for Lasting Change

You have to feel in order to heal.

No labels. No shame. Just grace, awareness, and God's presence.

Flourish with Rhonda

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PROCESSING WITH PURPOSE

Faith-Based Emotional Processing Strategies for Lasting Change

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Scripture quotations are used for personal study and encouragement.

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Welcome



Welcome to Processing with Purpose — a guide to understanding and processing the specific emotions that drive your drinking, grounded in both psychological science and spiritual wisdom.

For decades, you may have used alcohol as an emotional anesthetic. It numbed pain, silenced anxiety, soothed loneliness, and quieted shame. But numbing is not healing. True freedom comes through feeling your way through — with purpose, with support, and with God's presence.

I want you to know something before you turn another page. Discovering your triggers can feel uncomfortable at first. You may come face to face with emotions you have been avoiding for years, and that takes real courage. But here is what I have learned on my own journey: awareness is not a wound. Awareness is the doorway. Every time you choose to feel instead of numb, you are stepping closer to the lasting change and freedom God designed for you. You have what it takes to do this work.

Core Truth: "You have to feel in order to heal." — Rhonda Bunkley

My Trigger Categories Assessment

Rate how often each category triggers a craving or emotional urge on a scale of 1-5

(1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Frequently 5 = Almost Always)

Trigger Category	Description	My Rating (1-5)	Notes / When This Hits Hardest
Stress	Feeling overwhelmed, pressured, or stretched too thin		
Loneliness	Feeling isolated, disconnected, or unseen by others		
Fatigue	Physical or emotional exhaustion, running on empty		
Boredom	Lack of purpose, stimulation, or meaningful activity		
Celebration	Happy occasions, holidays, social gatherings, milestones		
Conflict	Arguments, tension, feeling disrespected or misunderstood		
Rejection	Feeling unwanted, dismissed, left out, or criticized		
Social Pressure	Environments or people where drinking feels expected		
Grief / Loss	Sadness over a person, relationship, dream, or season of life		
Habit / Routine	Times or places automatically linked to drinking		

After completing this assessment, circle your top 3 highest-rated categories. These are your primary trigger zones and the areas where this guide will help you most.

Part 1: Understanding Emotional Triggers

Why We Drink: The Emotion Connection

Alcohol is a depressant. It slows your nervous system and temporarily silences difficult emotions. But here is what actually happens:

- You feel something difficult — stress, loneliness, shame, anxiety
- You reach for alcohol seeking relief
- Temporary numbness — the difficult emotion is silenced
- The emotion returns, often stronger, plus guilt and shame about drinking
- The cycle repeats

Cognitive Insight: Emotions are information. They are your body's way of telling you something needs attention. When you numb emotions with alcohol, you miss the message. The underlying issue remains unresolved, and the need to numb intensifies.



The Seven Core Emotional Triggers

- Stress and Overwhelm
- Loneliness and Disconnection
- Shame and Guilt
- Anxiety and Fear
- Boredom and Restlessness
- Sadness and Grief
- Anger and Frustration

Part 2: Processing Each Core Emotion



Emotion 1: STRESS & OVERWHELM

What it feels like: Pressure, tension, feeling out of control, too much on your plate, racing thoughts.

Why you drink: "I need to decompress. I need relief. I cannot handle this."

The Problem: Alcohol temporarily silences stress but does not solve the problem. You wake up with the same stress plus a hangover and guilt.

Processing Stress with Purpose

Step 1: Name It

What specifically is stressing you? Is it work? Family? Finances? Health? Relationships? Write it down. Naming it reduces its power.

Step 2: Feel It

Where do you feel stress in your body? Chest? Shoulders? Stomach? Breathe into that sensation. Stress is your body saying something needs attention.

Step 3: Process It with Purpose

What action could you take? What needs to change? What is within your control and what is not?

Philippians 4:6-7

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

■ Rhonda's Reflection: On Stress and Type A Personalities

I know this trigger well. Work stress and type A personalities used to send me straight to a glass of wine before I even walked all the way through the door.

What I had to learn and what I still practice today is the difference between responding and reacting. Reacting is automatic and fear-based. Responding is intentional and faith-based.

Now when I feel that pressure building I take deep breaths and remind myself that I choose to respond and not react. I remind myself that God's got me.

Philippians 4:6-7 is my anchor for stress. I come back to it again and again. Not anxious about ANYTHING. That is a big promise and God means it.

— With love and grace, Rhonda

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "I cannot handle this stress without a drink"

Consider: *"I can feel this stress, name it, and take one faith-based step toward relief. God's peace is available to me right now."*

Your Reflection Space:

What is stressing me right now:

One small action I can take:

Stress Mapping Exercise

For each stress source below, write what is in your control and one faith-based action step.

Stress Source	In My Control?	One Faith Step



Emotion 2: LONELINESS & DISCONNECTION

What it feels like: Isolation, being unseen, feeling disconnected, emptiness.

Why you drink: "I drink to feel less alone. It is my companion. It makes me feel less empty."

The Problem: Alcohol is a false companion. It deepens loneliness and isolation.



Processing Loneliness with Purpose

Step 1: Name It

When do you feel most lonely? Is it specific times or situations? Is it loneliness from being alone or disconnection from feeling unseen even with others?

Step 2: Feel It

Loneliness is painful and it is telling you something. You need connection. Instead of numbing, sit with it. What is it asking for?

Step 3: Process It with Purpose

Who could you reach out to? A friend, family member, support group, therapist, or faith community? What kind of connection do you need? What is one small connection you could make today?

Psalm 34:18

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

■ Rhonda's Reflection: What I Found Instead of Loneliness

I want to share something that might sound a little different from what you expect here.

Honestly, I do not really struggle with loneliness anymore. And I know that might sound strange. But here is what happened. As my relationship with alcohol decreased, my relationship with God deepened in a way that filled every empty space I had been trying to numb.

That connection with Him became my companion. My anchor. My peace in the quiet moments that used to feel unbearable.

Now I actually cherish solitude. I sit with my journal and my coffee and I pray and ask God to silence every voice that is not from Him. And in that stillness I feel more connected than I ever did at the bottom of a glass.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted. He is not far away. He is right there waiting.

— *With love and grace, Rhonda*

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "No one understands me. I am alone in this."

Consider: *"I am reaching out. I am connecting. And God is always with me even in the quiet moments."*

Your Reflection Space:

When I feel most lonely:

One connection I can make today:

Connection Action Plan

Identify three people or communities you could reach out to this week, and what kind of connection each could offer.

Who I Could Reach Out To	How (Call, Text, Visit, Prayer Group)	By When

Emotion 3: SHAME & GUILT

What it feels like: Unworthiness, self-judgment, deep self-criticism, feeling broken or like a failure.

Why you drink: "I drink to escape how I feel about myself. The shame is unbearable."

The Problem: Alcohol intensifies shame. You drink to escape shame, then feel more shame about drinking. The cycle deepens and becomes harder and harder to break.

Processing Shame with Purpose

Step 1: Name It

What are you ashamed of? Your drinking? Your past? How you have treated people? What story are you telling yourself? I am broken. I am a failure. I am unlovable.

Step 2: Challenge It

Is this story actually true? Or is it a belief you have accepted as fact? What would you tell someone you love who felt this same shame? Would you judge them as harshly as you judge yourself?

Step 3: Feel It with Compassion

Shame thrives in silence and self-judgment. It loses its power in compassion and truth. Can you speak to yourself with the same kindness you would offer a friend?

Romans 8:1

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

■ Rhonda's Reflection: The Shame Cycle

I want to talk about this one honestly because shame was at the very center of my drinking for years.



Here is how the cycle worked for me. I felt ashamed of something. So I drank to numb the shame. And then I felt ashamed that I drank. So I drank more. It was a vicious cycle and it just kept tightening.

What finally helped me break through was learning to talk to myself the way I would talk to someone I deeply loved who was struggling.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That means you. Right now. Exactly as you are.

— With love and grace, Rhonda

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "I am broken. I am a failure. I am unlovable."

Consider: *"I am human. I have been struggling with an addictive substance. I am worthy of the same grace and compassion I would give to someone I love."*

Your Reflection Space:

The shame I carry:

What I would tell someone I love who felt this shame:

Shame to Grace Exercise

For each shame message you carry, write the truth God says about you.

The Shame Message I Tell Myself	The Truth God Says About Me



Emotion 4: ANXIETY & FEAR

What it feels like: Worry, dread, panic, racing heart, inability to relax.

Why you drink: "I drink to calm my nervous system. Alcohol is the only thing that quiets the anxiety."

The Problem: Alcohol is a temporary fix that actually increases anxiety over time.



Processing Anxiety with Purpose

Step 1: Name It

What are you anxious about? Health? Finances? Relationships? Is this anxiety about something real or is it catastrophizing?

Step 2: Feel It

Anxiety is your nervous system trying to protect you. Instead of fighting it, acknowledge it. I am anxious. That is okay. I can feel this.

Step 3: Process It with Purpose

What is one small thing you can do to feel more in control? What is within your control and what is not?

1 Peter 5:7

"Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you."

■ Rhonda's Reflection: On Anxiety and Letting Go

Anxiety and I have had a long relationship. And for years I used wine as my off switch when my mind would not stop racing.

What I learned is that alcohol does not cure anxiety. It borrows against tomorrow. The next morning my anxiety was always worse, not better.

What actually works for me is what I call the Give It to God practice. When anxiety starts to spiral, I stop and literally say out loud: I give this to you, God. I cannot carry this. You can.

1 Peter 5:7 reminds me that God actually wants to carry my burdens. He is not indifferent to my anxiety. He cares for me.

— With love and grace, Rhonda

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "Something bad will happen. I cannot handle this."

Consider: *"I am anxious and that is okay. I can feel this. God is with me and His peace is available right now."*

Your Reflection Space:

What I am anxious about:

One step I will take this week:

Anxiety Audit

List your current worries and sort them: What is real vs. catastrophized? What can you act on vs. release to God?

My Worry	Real or Catastrophized?	Act On It / Release It



Emotion 5: BOREDOM & RESTLESSNESS

What it feels like: Emptiness, lack of purpose, restlessness, seeking stimulation.

Why you drink: "I drink because I am bored. It gives me something to do. It makes life feel more interesting."

The Problem: Boredom is often a sign that something deeper is missing — purpose, connection, engagement, joy.

Processing Boredom with Purpose

Step 1: Name It

Is this true boredom or avoidance? What would bring you alive? What used to excite you?

Step 2: Feel It

Boredom is often a sign you are disconnected from purpose or joy. What is it asking for?

Step 3: Process It with Purpose

What brings you joy? Creativity? Service? Learning? Connection? Nature? What is one thing you could do today that would engage you?

Psalm 37:4

"Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

■ Rhonda's Reflection: On Filling the Empty Spaces

Boredom used to be a big trigger for me in the evenings. That 5 to 7 o'clock window when the day was winding down and my mind had space to wander.

What I had to learn was that I was not actually bored. I was avoiding. Avoiding thinking about things that felt unresolved. Avoiding the quiet that made me uncomfortable.

And most importantly, I started using those quiet moments to actually be present. With God. With myself. With the life that was right in front of me.

— With love and grace, Rhonda

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "I am bored. Nothing matters. I need a drink."

Consider: *"I am searching for purpose and joy. What would make me feel fully alive today?"*

Your Reflection Space:

What brings me alive:

One step I will take this week:

Joy Inventory

List activities, people, and places that have brought you genuine joy. Choose one to plan this week.

What Brings Me Joy	How Long Since I Did This?	Can I Plan It This Week?



Emotion 6: SADNESS & GRIEF

What it feels like: Deep sadness, heaviness, loss, emptiness, despair.

Why you drink: "I drink to numb the pain. The sadness is too much to bear."

The Problem: Grief needs to be felt and processed, not numbed. Numbing prolongs the pain.

Processing Sadness with Purpose

Step 1: Name It

What are you grieving? A loss? A relationship? A dream? Your health? Your past?

Step 2: Feel It

Sadness is sacred. It is your heart saying this mattered. Instead of numbing, allow yourself to feel it. Cry. Express it.

Step 3: Process It with Purpose

Who can you share this with? A friend, a therapist, a faith community, God? What would honor this loss or grief?

Matthew 5:4

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

■ Rhonda's Reflection: On Grief and What We Carry

Sadness and grief are the emotions I think we run from the hardest. And I understand why. They hurt.



But what I have found is that unfelt grief does not go away. It waits. It comes out sideways. In anger. In numbness. In that hollow ache that drives you to reach for something to fill it.

True healing requires that we actually mourn what we have lost. And God says the mourners are blessed. Not broken. Not weak. Blessed.

Give yourself permission to grieve. You do not have to be strong every moment. Sadness is not something to be fixed. It is something to be honored.

— With love and grace, Rhonda

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "This pain is unbearable. I need to numb it."

Consider: "This sadness is real and valid. I am allowing myself to feel it and move through it with God beside me."

Your Reflection Space:

What I am grieving:

One step I will take this week:

Grief Honor Exercise

What have you lost that you have not fully grieved? Write it below and identify one way you can honor that loss this week.

What I Have Not Fully Grieved	How I Can Honor It This Week	Who Can Support Me



Emotion 7: ANGER & FRUSTRATION

What it feels like: Rage, irritation, resentment, feeling wronged.

Why you drink: "I drink to calm down. Alcohol is the only thing that stops me from exploding."

The Problem: Alcohol suppresses anger temporarily but does not resolve the underlying issue. Anger often returns stronger.



Processing Anger with Purpose

Step 1: Name It

What are you angry about? Someone's behavior? An injustice? Feeling disrespected? Powerlessness? Is this anger justified?

Step 2: Feel It

Anger is information. It is saying something is wrong, a boundary has been crossed, something needs to change.

Step 3: Process It with Purpose

What needs to change? Do you need to set a boundary, have a conversation, or take action? What is within your control?

Ephesians 4:26

"In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

■ Rhonda's Reflection: On Anger and Responding Not Reacting

Anger was always the trigger I found hardest to admit because it felt so unlike who I wanted to be.

But here is what I learned. Anger is not bad. Anger is information. It is telling you something matters to you. A boundary was crossed. A value was violated. Something needs to change.

What works for me now is my responding not reacting practice. When I feel anger rising, I pause. I breathe. I ask myself: What is this really about? What do I actually need here?

Ephesians 4:26 does not say do not be angry. It says in your anger do not sin. God gives us permission to be angry. He just asks us to handle it with wisdom.

— With love and grace, Rhonda

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "I am so angry. I need a drink to calm down."

Consider: *"I am angry because something matters to me. I choose to respond from faith not fear. What needs to change?"*

Your Reflection Space:

What I am angry about:

One step I will take this week:

Anger Clarity Exercise

Anger often points to an unmet need or crossed boundary. Use this to clarify what is really happening.

What Made Me Angry	The Real Need Behind It	Healthy Response I Can Choose



My Personal Trigger Map

Use this map to track your emotional triggers in real time. The more honestly you fill this in, the clearer your patterns become.

Trigger (What happened?)	Emotion (What did I feel?)	Typical Response (What I usually do)	New Healthy Response (What I choose now)

Pattern I notice in my triggers:



Part 3: Your 30-Day Emotional Processing Practice



Daily Emotional Check-In

For the next 30 days, use this simple practice each day:

1. What emotion did I feel today?
2. What triggered it?
3. Did I numb it with alcohol or did I process it?
4. If I processed it, how? Talked to someone? Journalled? Prayed? Took action?
5. What did I learn?

A Gentle Reframe for Your Emotions

Your emotions are not a problem. They are information. They are your body and spirit communicating with you.

A Gentle Reframe

Instead of: "I have so many difficult emotions. I will never be free."

Consider: *"I am learning to feel and process my emotions. Each emotion I face is an opportunity to heal."*

Philippians 4:13

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

My Top Five Triggers

Identifying your top triggers is the first step to changing your response. Use your Trigger Map and Categories Assessment to complete this worksheet.

Trigger #1

Trigger:

Emotion it causes:

Pattern I notice:

My old response:

My new healthy response:

My faith anchor for this trigger:

Trigger #2

Trigger:

Emotion it causes:

Pattern I notice:

My old response:

My new healthy response:

My faith anchor for this trigger:

Trigger #3

Trigger:

Emotion it causes:

Pattern I notice:

My old response:

My new healthy response:

My faith anchor for this trigger:

Trigger #4

Trigger:

Emotion it causes:

Pattern I notice:

My old response:

My new healthy response:

My faith anchor for this trigger:

Trigger #5

Trigger:

Emotion it causes:

Pattern I notice:

My old response:

My new healthy response:

My faith anchor for this trigger:

The biggest pattern I see across my top triggers:

My commitment to myself:

Closing Reflection



Your emotions are not your enemy. They are your teachers. They are showing you what matters, what needs attention, what needs to change, and where you need support.

With awareness comes understanding. With understanding comes choice. With choice comes freedom.

You are not your emotions. You are the one who can feel them, understand them, and choose how to respond. And every time you do, you are healing. You are rewiring your brain. You are building a new relationship with yourself and with God.

Freedom is not found only in the big milestones. It is found in the ordinary moments. It is found in peace. It is found in presence. It is found in being fully awake to the life God has given you.

Philippians 4:13

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

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