

A green rectangular sign with rounded corners and a white border, containing the title in white, bold, sans-serif font. The sign is supported by two dark blue poles. The background is a complex, 3D-rendered maze of grey roads with white dashed lines, set against a light blue sky with soft clouds.

# INTERIOR FREEDOM: A REFLECTIVE GUIDE AND EXERCISE

**Ted Dunn, Ph.D.**

*"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."  
John 8:32*

**F**or those who have engaged in the spiritual work of personal or communal discernment, the concept of interior freedom is known as a requisite element for listening deeply to God. Sifting and sorting what is of God versus the urgings of our own ego is a lifetime endeavor to be sure. However, when communities use communal discernment for electing new leaders or making major decisions, or when we personally discern new life choices, there is typically a date certain for decisions to be made. In such time-bound processes of discernment the work of interior freedom needs even more attention.

Whether we are Quaker or Catholic, Buddhist or Baptist, our ability to hear what God has to say is only made possible when we are interiorly free enough to listen. In the Catholic tradition, interior freedom is said to be key for establishing a space hospitable enough for the soul to converse with the promptings of the Spirit. In every religious tradition, the emptying of our worldly concerns, the easing of our egos and the stripping of our masks are essential in order to allow the eternal light to shine more fully.

Interior freedom is not an easy concept to grasp, let alone attain in practice. Is the notion of “interior freedom” (or “holy indifference”) just a religious abstraction? How do you hold the tension of what you hope will be an outcome of your discernment while remaining open to an unknown outcome, surrendering to a process no matter where it leads? How do you remain passionately invested in your convictions and detached at the same time? What if your time is different than God’s time or the allotted time of a communal process? Integrating what psychologists know about how we cope with painful truths along with the traditional spiritual knowledge of discernment will aid us in understanding this paradoxical and ethereal concept of interior freedom.

What I am offering here are not replacements for the many time-honored approaches to discernment (e.g., Ignatian discernment). Rather, I am offering a few supplemental processes to add to the repertoire of processes you might already be using. This article includes a reflective exercise that many groups have found helpful in my facilitation of communal discernment processes. Hopefully, these will assist you in your efforts to enlarge the chamber where your deepest truths reside.

## CONTEXT

Some years ago I was directing a discernment retreat and, as is my practice, I offered a reflective guide to assist those who were discerning the call to elected leadership. The planning committee was particularly concerned because their community was relatively new to communal discernment and expressed anxiety about opening up and sharing on a more personal level. They asked if I could help the participants ease their concerns so they could move to a deeper level in their discernment.

Among the many prayers and processes used, I offered them this reflection and exercise that I am now sharing with you. The reflection and companion exercise were originally designed with these goals in mind: 1) To normalize the fact that all of us, even the most holy among us, have urges to hide from truths that are painful; 2) to give a concrete understanding of this otherwise abstract concept of interior freedom and provide specific ways in which it can be enhanced; 3) to help the participants name and claim their own ways of defending against disturbing truths and constricting their inner freedom; and, 4) to help them take ownership and make choices about easing their defenses so as to embrace the truth that Jesus promised would set us free.

As you read the reflection that follows please understand that its light-hearted tone was used to ease the anxiety of participants and help them talk more specifically about the concept of interior freedom. The setup for the room included various religious symbols to aid their discernment. Strangely enough it also included a number of pharmacy bottles containing “Truth Tablets” (explained below). The Truth Tablets (actually M & M’s) became a palatable and playful symbol of the truths they hoped to discover and share along the way. It is worth noting that these Truth Tablets were entirely consumed over the course of the retreat—a testimony, perhaps, to the truth they yearned would set them free!

This particular process was so effective that I have since used it with a number of groups embarking on a journey of communal discernment. While the reflection is set in a playful tone, it focuses upon the poignant fact that as much as we all seek the truth, we all hide from it as well. I wish to normalize these hide-and-seek games so we can more easily own and explore these. If we don’t know that we are hiding, how would we even gauge our inner freedom? If we don’t know our inimitable ways of managing uncomfortable truths, how can we ever make a conscious choice to ease our defenses and set our truth free?

The companion exercise on naming, claiming and making choices on the defenses we use is also included in this article. While it sounds a bit psychological, please understand that it is intended to aid in the spiritual work of discernment. It is to aid in your becoming more whole and holy, and therefore, more attuned to the movements of grace. The list provides concrete examples of the many ways we disguise, control and conceal truths that we otherwise experience as aversive. I then offer suggestions for working with your defenses in order to expand your interior freedom. I offer this reflection and exercise for those who are seeking to walk more deeply and honestly with God in discerning an important call.

## THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE, IF . . .

Wouldn’t it be something if you could take a pill and the truth would be revealed? If Truth Tablets could be manufactured and bottled, if they could be purchased at the Tabernacle Pharmacy, the bottle would probably have wrapped around it a warning label. It might read something like this:

**Warning:** Use only as directed for freedom from sin and wayward pursuits, as well as relief from unnecessary pain and depression.

Common side effects may include upset stomach, headaches and insomnia. You may experience heart palpitations, weakness and fatigue. Leakage of bodily fluids, including sweaty palms and uncontrollable tearing, is known to occur when taken during times of personal crisis. Identity confusion may also occur. If taken in excess, or without proper nourishment, conflict and tension may arise with intimate others. Consult Psalm 139 if side effects persist for more than a week.

Lastly, do not share these Truth Tablets with others who are not seeking the truth. If they think they already know all of the truth they wish to know, these pills could be hazardous to their health!

### *Truth by Way of the Gospel*

Now, without these Truth Tablets that make truth-telling and truth-listening easy, would you *really* want to seek the truth? Most of us have probably come to realize through our own experience that Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said: “You will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Indeed, the truth does set us free. Intellectually, we know this. Through our lived experience, we know this. Spiritually, we hunger for this. Emotionally, however, we dread it. We humans have a love-hate relationship with the truth. Why? Because we know the path toward spiritual enlightenment is an inherently painful one.



We know, for example, that the most important discoveries during our lifetime have been ones that disrupted our lives. These changed who we knew ourselves to be and led us to alter or leave significant relationships. The birth of new truth demands that we understand our life differently and behave in new ways. The emergence of truth requires that we make room for the “new” through a labor of letting go. What are some of the things we are asked to let go of? We are asked to let go of:

- Traditions and the way things have always been;
- The known, the comfortable and the familiar;
- Our pride and our need to be right;
- Relationships that once helped us to grow to who we are today, but can no longer assist in who we are becoming;
- Ministries to which we were once called, but which no longer express how God is calling us to offer our gifts;
- Our need for control, to figure things out ahead of time or be given guarantees so we don’t need to rely on our faith, one another, or God;
- Our old ways of understanding our faith, who God is in our life and the reason we have been graced with the gift of life.

When we let go of something we once valued, someone we have loved or something that we have grown accustomed to, like it or not, it hurts. We humans, by our very nature, get attached to things. We get attached to buildings and land, to people and principles, and to our patterns of going through life. It seems we are made for getting attached. It is our very nature to do so. Getting unattached, however, does not seem natural at all. We have to work at it. Letting go is hard for us because it hurts.

Consequently, while we want to be set free by searching out the truth, because of all this hurt we tend to go into the search a little tightly wrapped (if not kicking and screaming) because we know it’s going to hurt. The bigger the truth, the more important the truth, the more we want it and the more we fight it. Our spirit-being wants to respond by saying yes. Our human reaction, however, is to say, “Wait a minute. How much

will this cost?” We ask ourselves, *Is the freedom that comes by way of the truth worth the labor involved to discern it?*

Our life experience would tell us that once a new truth is finally out, once we are on the other side, we often find that living in that truth is not so bad. In fact, if in our efforts to give birth to it we have owned it, claimed it and worked it through, then living it out isn’t so bad at all. Once on the other side, we do find ourselves freer. We find ourselves less encumbered by the baggage we unloaded. We are freer to breathe in new life now that we have cleaned out the clutter. We find that being more ourselves strengthens us. We find ourselves closer to God and others with whom we struggled along the way because we went through something powerful, something intimate, together. We find ourselves grateful to God for the choice and gift of new life.

So the caveat to what Jesus said, “The truth will set you free,” would go something like this: The truth will set you free *if* you are willing to go through what it takes to own it, claim it and work it through. The good news is that we can be set free by the truth. The bad news is that it will cost us something to do so.

#### *Truth by Way of Discernment*

Given that the process of communal discernment is one of seeking to understand the community’s call and God’s intentions and how these align with your soul’s desire, and given that such a search will involve the discovery of truths heretofore unknown, then it stands to reason that a bit of pain may be encountered along the way. For some of you, the pain may be a lot, while for others, just a little. For all of you who wish to be set free, however, the tension between your human aversion to pain and your spiritual hunger for freedom will be experienced. This tension, this ambivalence about the truth, directly impacts your interior freedom. The fidelity to your true self will be tested.

Simply put, interior freedom is a state of mind and heart that allows your inner truth and wisdom to be known, accepted and assimilated. It is like a chamber inside yourself, where your truth and God’s truth merge. Your freedom to accept the

truth, the size of this interior room, is in direct proportion to your readiness to receive the truth. The greater one's room is, the greater is one's ability to seek and accept the truth. If you are frightened of what the truth might bring, ambivalent because it might be disturbing, then the chamber shrinks. If, on the other hand, you are ready to receive the truth no matter the cost, then the room is enlarged. Your interior freedom is determined by how well you have prepared your heart, readied yourself to listen and worked with the fears that can otherwise constrict the truth and render you unfree.

So, given that your goal is discerning the truth and you could easily be ambivalent about what you might discover, then you are going to have to work at staying open. You will need to work toward enhancing your interior freedom and more fully embracing your true self. What if your physician declined to write you a prescription for Truth Tablets? What might you be able to do to ease the grip of fear, thereby making more room for your true self and God to converse?

## WORKING TOWARD INTERIOR FREEDOM

Here are five suggestions to help you work toward greater interior freedom. While reflection questions and processes can be developed for all five, for the purposes and limits of this article we will focus the companion exercise only on the first of these five suggestions—relaxing your defenses.

### *1. Relax your defenses.*

Defenses are a normal and necessary part of our human condition. We have them to ward off pain. Without them, we'd be like a turtle without its shell. They provide each of us with our own highly personalized pain management system. The flipside of this protective mechanism is that, by its very nature, it also distorts the truth. Defenses blunt our affect and blur our reality. Defenses shield us from being intimate not only with our inner selves and others, but with God. How we work with our defenses, therefore, has a direct bearing upon our degree of interior freedom and, therefore, the quality of our discernment.

Consequently, making choices about easing our defenses (or not) and determining what truths to pursue (or not) is an important aspect of working toward greater interior freedom. Unless we make choices to work with our defenses, our defenses will control us. In the anticipation of a painful discovery we unconsciously steel our defenses and set up firewalls. The same walls that protect us from potential pain also shield us from the truth. The truth becomes encapsulated and hidden behind our firewalls. So, unless we choose otherwise, we are not interiorly free.

Our defenses work outside our awareness, severely limiting our inner freedom until and unless we make conscious choices to free ourselves. We can choose to employ our defenses to the fullest or ease them and use only what we need. We can choose to open up some issues and not others. We can explore truths partially or more fully. We can learn to use our defenses more flexibly and by choice, rather than reactively and to extremes. In the companion exercise that follows I will invite you to name, claim and make choices about your defenses.

### *2. Connect to a touchstone faith experience.*

The paradoxes and mysteries of discernment are made clearer to us if we simply recall our own faith experiences. Perhaps if

you go back into these, you can use them as touchstones for discernment. If you can recall such moments in your own life, perhaps you will recall what it is like to be truly free. You will know more clearly the contrast between genuine freedom and something less. Let me give you just two of examples from my own life, one of birth and one of death, when I knew without any doubt that I was free and standing upon holy ground.

The birth of each of my three children was an experience wherein time stood still and I was completely and utterly aware for the first time in my life that miracles really existed and were a part of my life too. As I awkwardly fumbled to companion their arrival I became poignantly aware for the first time in my life of the awesome experience of God. It was painful and messy, frightening and beautiful all at the same time. In that labor and delivery room, I knew I was on holy ground.

When I journeyed with my sister-in-law and friend, Sr. Norma Lipsmeyer, as she passed through the doorway from this world to the next, I knew beyond any shadow of doubt that I was on holy ground. Ordinary time and ordinary life were irrelevant. I wanted nothing but to be fully present to Norma and my wife Beth, and I could barely stand to leave the room. Sorrow was as strong as the joy that enveloped it as Norma arranged for what she referred to as her "come to Jesus party." She ministered and comforted us to her last breath, as we did for her as well. I knew I was amidst the sacred. As we stood vigil to her passing I knew we were standing on holy ground.

These kinds of experiences are known to all of us on a faith journey. In all of these holy moments, the experience of being led is palpable. The sense of presence to one another and to God is all-consuming. Nothing matters more than just being here. During times such as these, pain and joy, death and life, mess and beauty commingle without the usual need for one to elbow out the other. All emotions are acceptable, as if to say, "of course" to the whole of our human experience. There is no shame or need to justify what is occurring. Ordinary time becomes surreal, sometimes standing still, sometimes speeding by, but it is irrelevant to just being present.

Ground yourself with scripture passages, images and memories that take you back and connect you with your own *touchstone faith experience*. Such an experience is one wherein you knew in every fiber of your being, in the deepest part of your being where your soul resides, that you were responding to God's invitation. Recall such a time in your life, wherein you struggled to discover God's intention, wherein you yearned for life anew, and you discovered God and yourself all over again. Recall the strength you experienced when standing upon the rock of God's Truth. Draw upon these memories and the strength of your faith experiences to assist you in reclaiming your freedom.

### *3. Suspend your judgments.*

Often times our inner freedom is severely constricted by the boxes, labels and judgments we use. Give yourself permission to think outside the box and entertain possibilities without rushing to judge them as viable or not, desirable or not, reasonable or not. You'll need to allow yourself the freedom to play with fantasy, unfettered by the rigors of reality. You'll need to free yourself to wonder and imagine things that otherwise would be censored by what is appropriate, "pooh-poohed" because they seem impractical or avoided because of the judgments of others.

You'll need to give yourself permission to play with possibilities for now, trusting that the time for judging them as realistic will come in earnest down the road. You'll need to know that frivolity and fantasy are just as necessary as the more sublime and sobering moments of prayer and reflection. Leave the judge and jury outside.

#### 4. Explore your resistance.

Explore, rather than avoid, your resistance to saying "yes" to wherever God is calling you. Consider your resistance as a source of great insight, not a barrier. Listen to it. What is your resistance? What is it telling you? How might your resistance be a source of strength and a gift? How might your resistance be an *as yet undiscovered piece of the truth* that, if owned by you, could set you free?

Understand and own your resistance, then look beyond it. What would your liberation from this resistance look like? How might you better integrate what is calling you forth or holding you back so as to deepen the truth, rather than oblige only one part of the truth? How can two, seemingly oppositional pieces of the truth be reconciled and brought together? What new way of looking at your resistance might provide greater integration and a bridge forward?

Listen to your language. Is it a language of choice or being a victim of circumstances or the pressure from others? Alter your language to ensure that you are making choices, proactively and with your eyes wide open. For example, change your language from "I can't" to "I won't" or "I choose not to" and see how that influences your inner freedom. Reflect upon these questions and search out the gift of your resistance.

#### 5. Visualize what liberation would look like.

Recall the words of Jesus about setting the captives free and bringing forth life in abundance. Ask yourself: *What would it be like if I were radically free of all the things that inhibit and keep me from being my true self? What would it be like if I were radically free from the "shoulds" and "ought to's" in my life, of judging and putting people in boxes?* Open yourself to God's grace in search of this kind of freedom.

Let your imagination run with this newly discovered, if only imagined, freedom. What might you be doing differently in your life, if you lived more fully out of your true self and not some persona? How might you be different in your presence with others? Who would be your circle of intimate friends? Then juxtapose this with your current way of being and your present path in life. Ask yourself, *Who am I growing to become? How is God nudging me, calling me, yearning for me to transform my life?*

In summary, these are some of the ways to work toward greater interior freedom:

- Ease the defenses that constrict your truth and conceal self-knowledge;
- Return to your touchstone faith experiences—those moments and places in your life where you best meet God;
- Play with possibilities, think outside of the box, and suspend your judgment;
- Explore your own resistance in order to gain insight and become freer from it;
- Visualize what liberation would look like beyond the struggle, to be radically free.

*What would it be like  
if I were radically  
free of all the things  
that inhibit and keep  
me from being my  
true self?*

## EXERCISE: WORKING WITH YOUR DEFENSES

This exercise is intended to assist you in naming, claiming and possibly easing your defenses so that you can make more conscious and deliberate choices regarding the truths you might wish to discover. Such self-knowledge and proactive choices will bring about greater interior freedom.

### Step 1. Name and claim your defenses.

What follows is a list of defenses or ways of coping with truths that are potentially disturbing and, therefore, eschewed. You may discover that you have ways of coping that are not listed or

are experienced somewhat differently. That's fine. Don't feel confined to the boxes or view these as good or bad. A zebra's stripes or a turtle's shell are not good or bad. Remember, we all employ defenses in the threat of pain. We instinctually *fight* or *flee* in a variety of ways.

Look through and study the list, and place a checkmark next to all that apply. Write in your own defenses or modify the ones offered so they fit you. Then go back and prioritize five or so that you use most often. Increasing your awareness of your own style is the first step toward greater control over how and when to use them.

✓	Defense	Description
	Acting In	This is the same as somaticizing (see "somaticize"). It means absorbing our emotions inwardly, with our body, instead of expressing them. As a result we might get a variety of bodily reactions (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, ulcers, diarrhea, rashes, twitches, etc.).
	Acting Out	Acting out our emotions (e.g., gambling, drinking, eating, driving fast, running) helps to get our uncomfortable feelings out of our system.
	Attacking	Verbally or physically attacking others in order to ward off the threat.
	Canonizing	Using canon law as a way to intellectualize and mask uncomfortable feelings. It is a way to sway an argument by using an external authority (see also "psychologize" or "theologize").
	Compartmentalize	Putting your emotions in a drawer and dealing with them later. Dealing with one issue at a time rather than swimming in them all at the same time.
	Denial	This is a way to disconnect the feeling from the event. I know it's happening, but I have no feelings about it. An example of this is covering your eyes when watching the scary part of a movie (i.e., If I can't see it, it's not really there).
	Displacement	Scapegoating someone or something else for the problem (e.g., you are mad at someone, but take it out on someone else)
	Eating	Over-eating (binging) comfort food helps some people cope with stress. Under-eating (fasting) helps others.
	Idealize-Devalue	People are seen either as wonderful or horrible. Relationships and emotions are easier to handle if people are put in simple boxes (good/evil) and the gray is left out.
	Identification	Just as children identify with their parents, we identify with our mentors. Identifying with others can be a way of learning but also a way of handling difficulty vicariously.
	Incorporation	This means swallowing what someone says hook, line and sinker. This is emotionally easier than having to chew on it.
	Intellectualize	Taking any area of intellectual knowledge and using it to mask uncomfortable feelings (see also "psychologize," "spiritualize," "canonize," "journalize" and "theologize").
	Isolation	Blunting all feelings. It is as if a big wet blanket is thrown over the emotional side of life and wipes out all affect.
	Journalize	Using your journals to work through the emotion.
	Judgmentalism	Looking at the speck in another's eye is a lot easier than looking at your own plank. Judging and labeling others puts people in a neat package and keeps the focus away from your issues.
	Minimize	This is an effort to make a molehill out of a mountain of pain. We say things like, "It's no big deal" and "I'm fine," in order to talk ourselves into feeling more at ease with something.

✓	Defense	Description
	<b>Moralize</b>	It is easier to assume someone is "sinful," "bad," or "wrong" than to wrangle with the gray nuances of life choices.
	<b>Negate</b>	This is the "yes-but" disease. This means that every time someone offers a hopeful suggestion, we negate it. We take away the hope because it is too risky to hope any more. We answer suggestions with, "Yes, but . . ." then proceed to explain why what someone is suggesting wouldn't work.
	<b>Obfuscate</b>	We lie, spin, lob red herrings and create smoke screens to confuse and ward off someone who is upset. We can also lie to ourselves rather than face a difficult truth. Creating confusion is a powerful defense against clarity that hurts.
	<b>Over-Generalize</b>	When we over-generalize, we gloss over all sorts of things, especially the uncomfortable emotions. This is easier than chewing on the particulars and the exceptions.
	<b>Over-Personalize</b>	Some people are willing to take the blame for just about anything, rather than face the challenge of others (e.g., "Yeah, you're right. It is all my fault").
	<b>Passive-Aggression</b>	This occurs when aggression is veiled or masked in an expression that carries another face (e.g., sarcasm). The aggressor can hide behind the meaning, saying, in a sense, "I didn't really mean to hurt you. It was just a joke" (or a mistake, or whatever).
	<b>Projection</b>	Projection means putting the blame onto someone else for the pain I am in (e.g., You made me so mad. It's all your fault).
	<b>Psychologize</b>	Using psychology and "psychobabble" as a way to intellectualize and mask uncomfortable feelings (see Canonize or Spiritualize).
	<b>Rationalize</b>	This is a way of finding excuses for something happening that eases the pain (e.g., "I guess she drove too fast. It's no wonder she had an accident").
	<b>Reaction Formation</b>	Turning a negative emotion into a positive one. This is a valiant effort to try to erase the bad feeling by putting your best foot forward (e.g., hug someone when you are really upset with them; smile when you are down).
	<b>Regression</b>	To regress means to go back to an earlier (i.e., more primitive) pattern of coping. For example, perhaps you used to drive fast when under stress. For the most part, you don't do this anymore, but when under high stress, you might regress back to this old behavior.
	<b>Repression</b>	Repression prevents uncomfortable thoughts and concomitant feelings from ever reaching conscious awareness (unlike "suppression"). It is a mechanism that filters out bad stuff and lets into our awareness only acceptable stuff.
	<b>Somaticize</b>	This is the fancy word for "acting in." It means absorbing our emotions inward, with our body, instead of expressing them. As a result, we might get a variety of bodily reactions (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, ulcers, diarrhea, rashes, twitches, etc.).
	<b>Spiritualize</b>	Using spirituality, and spiritual ideas, as a way to "intellectualize" and mask uncomfortable feelings.
	<b>Splitting</b>	Splitting the world into black and white categories (e.g., all good or all bad). Emotions are less messy this way.
	<b>Sublimation</b>	Putting your emotional energy to work. In other words, channeling your upset into constructive work (e.g., cleaning or doing work when you are upset).
	<b>Suppression</b>	Suppressing something means pushing it down, outside of our conscious awareness. It means it became conscious first, then we stuffed it. This is different than "repression" wherein something never reaches conscious awareness.
	<b>Triangulate</b>	Going to a third person (e.g., friend, superior or confidant) to complain about someone in the hopes that they will do something about it so that you don't have to; it is the easy way out.
	<b>Theologize</b>	Using theology and theological ideas as a way to intellectualize and mask uncomfortable feelings.
	<b>Withdraw</b>	Pull away physically or emotionally from the person or situation that is upsetting.

## **Step 2. Unguard your heart and open your mind.**

Now that you have a handle on your own defenses or coping strategies, reflect upon how you might wish to work with these in discernment. Here are a few suggestions.

### **Recognize the value.**

It is important to appreciate the fact that pain is necessary for us to mature. This isn't new information, but somehow it is easy to lose sight of this when we are in pain. We just wish it would go away. In order to motivate change, we need pain to push us. In order to attain wisdom and deeper knowledge of life, we need the experience of *working through* our pain. In order to experience compassion and empathy for others, we must know what pain feels like. In order to grieve and give way to new life, we must express the pain of loss. And in order to discern well and open our hearts, we must ache for God's compassion. You don't have to like pain, but before you react hastily and marshal your defenses, recall its value to make you whole and holy.

### **Make proactive choices.**

If you do not want to react defensively, you will need to know your options. If you recognize that you are defending yourself against some kind of painful truth, ask yourself: Is this something that is wise for me to keep hidden? Would you have more freedom in discernment by opening this issue up or leaving it contained? What will it do for you to make either choice? How might your choice affect others? Explore your options and make a proactive choice.

### **Use only what you need when you need it.**

Sometimes we use a sledgehammer to kill a fly. We can become so phobic of pain that the slightest hint of pain evokes an all-out war against it. Ease up. You have an arsenal of defenses, so pick and choose what you need. Maybe you can deal with parts of the pain while leaving other parts at bay. Maybe you can compartmentalize the issue for today and choose to deal with it tomorrow when you have the time. Maybe you could share parts of your story with the discerning group, but leave other parts private. Use your defenses in degrees, rather than in an all-or-nothing manner.

### **Claim your defenses while in conversation.**

If you find yourself becoming defensive while in a conversation, it helps to state your defensive urges and your desires to behave otherwise. If you can name it and claim it aloud you'll have a bit more power over it than if you try to manage your defensive reactions silently. It also will help the person with whom you are interacting appreciate what is going on. If you state your efforts to behave otherwise, they are likely to cut you some slack in recognition of your efforts. For example, say something like, "I have an urge to shut down and I don't want to do that." Or, "I have an urge to argue with you and I don't want to do that. . . ."

### **Broaden your repertoire.**

Maybe you don't know all the ways that are available to you for coping. Take a lesson from your friends. Perhaps they have discovered some great ways to cope with painful issues

that are effective. Maybe you've never heard of "compartmentalization." Perhaps you've never tried journaling. There are countless ways to cope. Get more creative, broaden your repertoire and you'll have greater flexibility and freedom.

Discernment is an especially graced opportunity to become freer and more open in your response to God's unceasing invitation to new life. In addition to the many processes you might already be using, ease your defenses that conceal your deeper truths and let your soul discover that for which it yearns.

According to the riches of God's glory, may you have the power for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and you may be filled with the utter fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:16-19

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