



## Adult Psychological Defenses as Sin that Hinders Emotional Healing

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Children encounter many situations in which they are unable to handle the full magnitude of the psychological stress/trauma. Our perception is that psychological defenses are tools the Lord gives us to help us survive psychological trauma in childhood. Psychological defenses help the child reduce the apparent size of the stress/trauma so that they can manage it with their child-sized emotional resources. When we become adults, it is time to bring the traumatic memories fully into the light so that they can be completely and permanently healed. Psychological defenses hinder this process, and therefore become sinful<sup>1</sup>, at the point the Lord is directing the person to expose and heal the traumatic memories.<sup>2</sup> Many of the psychological defenses can be used to avoid bringing sin into the light in much the same way they are used to avoid bringing traumatic memories into the light. Releasing psychological defenses will facilitate exposing and dealing with both the traumatic memories and the sin in our lives.

**Dissociation**<sup>3</sup>: The mind uses dissociation to cope with traumatic events that are so immediately unbearable (unbearably painful, and/or frightening, and/or overwhelming) that the child cannot “stay in” the traumatic event. A “part” of the mind disconnects (dissociates), and stays in the traumatic event, while the rest of the mind goes somewhere else (people will sometimes describe watching from outside the body, not feeling any of the pain). The memory of the traumatic event is also immediately unbearable, so this same dissociated “part” of the mind is given the task of carrying the traumatic memory. The person is left feeling like “nothing happened” or “that didn’t hurt.” The trauma is “gone,” except to the part that carries it.

**Repression**: The mind uses repression to cope with traumatic events that are too painful and/or overwhelming to hold in normal memory in their full intensity. The child stays connected through the traumatic experience, but the memory is too painful and/or overwhelming to live with on an ongoing basis. Over time, repression progressively modifies the memory in order to make it less painful. The most painful details of the memory fade, becoming faint, vague, or forgotten completely. Painful implications of the memory are obscured. The most painful emotions are blunted, muted. Sometimes the entire memory is repressed to the point of being “forgotten” (unavailable to the conscious adult mind).

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the concept that sin is anything less than the Lord’s best plan. This concept comes especially from the New Testament, where the Greek word most often used for sin is *hamartia*, “to miss the mark.”

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ed Smith also discusses the appropriate place of psychological defenses in childhood and the ways in which they interfere with healing in the present. See *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* (Campbellsville, KY: Alathia Publishing), p.103-104,146.

<sup>3</sup> This is a very brief summary of “complete” or severe dissociation, which is what most authors are describing/referring to when they talk about dissociation. See “now that we have tools that work, we can look at all this stuff”, *Dissociative Phenomena: Case Study & Reflections* for a discussion of “partial” or mild-moderate dissociation.

**Denial:** Denial is choosing to “look away” from the stuff in our lives that we don’t want to deal with. We know it is there. It is accessible to our conscious adult minds – we could see it if we chose to look at it. We just choose not to look. It is like walking around the edge of the living room looking at the walls, vaguely aware that we are avoiding the middle of the room (and the possibility that there could be an elephant there), but choosing not to look at the middle of the room and choosing not to look at the fact that we are avoiding the middle of the room. “I’m not avoiding anything, I’m walking around the edge of the room and looking at the walls so that I can see all of these nice pictures on the walls.”

**Avoidance:** In some ways, avoidance is especially sneaky because it pretends to acknowledge the full magnitude of a trauma and/or sin (“Oh yes, I can see there is an elephant in the living room. I agree there is an elephant in the living room, and that it is a big problem”), but then very subtly reduces the apparent size by moving the problem into the future (“I’m going to deal with it, but just not right now. Tomorrow – maybe next week – maybe when I have the time and money for more appointments”). There is always a reason to not deal with it right here, right now.

**Rationalization:** In rationalization, the person uses rational arguments to justify sinful behavior and/or avoid dealing with traumatic memories. For example, “Everybody steals from the company... I work harder than the other guys so I deserve some extra compensation... anybody in my position would do the same thing,” or “These nightmares (of being raped by my grandfather) don’t mean anything. Everybody has nightmares. They could just be an accidental connection between memories of my grandfather and scenes from some movie I saw.” As mentioned below, rationalization often helps to avoid dealing with traumatic memories by justifying other defenses.

**Minimization:** Minimization is closely related to rationalization, and directly tries to reduce the apparent size of sins and/or trauma. Most (all?) minimization includes logical distortions. For example, “Dad wasn’t alcoholic or abusive – everybody in our neighborhood got drunk and beat their kids on the weekends” (logical distortion: being common somehow makes it less traumatic); “I don’t think this memory is important – he wasn’t trying to hurt us” (logical distortion: behavior towards us is not traumatic unless there is malicious intent); “My childhood wasn’t that bad – lots of women have been abused way worse than me” (logical distortion: my experiences were not traumatic because others have been hurt worse). Putting them all together: “It’s not like it’s the end of the world to have an elephant in the living room. Lot’s of people have elephants in their living rooms. In fact, I had an uncle who kept an elephant in his living room for years. He’s not trying to cause problems – he just bumps into things because he is so big. Just be glad ours is an Indian elephant – the people with the African elephants are the ones who are really in trouble.”

**Perfectionism:** The core of perfectionism is refusing to do something unless I can do it perfectly. Perfectionism tries to protect me from disapproval and rejection. It tries to ensure that others will always be happy with what I do. Perfectionism avoids dealing directly with fear of rejection and disapproval, and the underlying rejection and disapproval wounds and lies. Releasing perfectionism requires me to be willing to make mistakes and requires me to be willing to deal with people being unhappy with me when I do make mistakes. Releasing perfectionism will free me to do the many things the Lord is asking me to do, even though I can’t yet do them perfectly.

**Obsessions and compulsions:** Our experience is that many obsessions and compulsions are psychological defense mechanisms that help the person feel more in control. They avoid dealing directly with the fear of being out of control and the underlying traumatic memories where the

person felt out of control. We have consistently observed that when a person stops using their obsessive compulsive defenses during prayer for emotional healing, their negative emotions will increase, and then they will begin to connect with the underlying wounds and lies.

**Other:** There are many other psychological defenses. We will add specific comments about others as we have time to do so.

**Combination packs:** Defenses often come in combination packs. Rationalization goes well with lots of other defenses. For example, avoidance gets past the integrity monitor much more easily if it is accompanied by a good explanation: “I’m not avoiding these issues, I’m just waiting until the right time – I think I will be more able to do this after \_\_\_\_\_ (I finish this big project, graduation, the wedding, we finish moving, my children finish college, the Lord comes back).” Dissociation, repression, denial, and avoidance often work together. Dissociation cuts out the worst parts of a traumatic memory, repression applies subtle modifications to “downsize” whatever is left, and denial looks away from the awareness that there are holes and modifications in my memory files of the traumatic event. Often there is still a vague awareness that I am pretending everything is okay, but that there is “something wrong with the picture.” Avoidance cleans up these last scraps with “Yeah, something’s not quite right here... I just don’t want to think about it *right now*.”<sup>4</sup>

**Gradual process:** Our perception is that it is appropriate to release psychological defenses over time. If the person receiving ministry totally released all dissociation, repression, denial, and avoidance at her first prayer for emotional healing session, she would suddenly be confronted with the full emotional magnitude of all the trauma and sin in her life. This would probably be more than she could deal with constructively, even as an adult, and would therefore not be the Lord’s best plan. We have tried to formulate our sample prayers and commands so that they leave space for this gradual release of our defenses.

**More than one location:** Any given psychological defense can be carried separately by the core self and by different internal parts. When evaluating whether prayers and commands have been effective, it is important to realize that resolving a given psychological defense carried by a specific dissociated part is different than resolving that specific defense in all locations – it is important to check with the same internal parts that participated in the prayers and commands. See “General Introductory Comments Regarding Ministry Aids” for additional comments.

**Local strongholds, demons, and curses:** My sense is that there are sometimes spiritual strongholds, demonic spirits, and curses that are connected to/associated with the specific defenses that are being addressed, and therefore lose their protection/anchor when the defenses in question are released. In these situations it is easy and important to finish with commands to deal with the spiritual strongholds, demonic spirits, and curses that have just been exposed. I target the specific, local strongholds, demons, and spirits in question by including the local “address” in the commands. For example, “In the name of Jesus, we command that all spiritual strongholds connected to or associated with *denial, avoidance, self deception, and voluntary blindness regarding Mary’s sexual abuse* be torn down now.” See “General Introductory Comments...” for additional comments.

**Systemic patterns of psychological defenses:** We have also observed that, in addition to being

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<sup>4</sup> “Dissociation, Repression, Denial, and Avoidance: ‘Where did kindergarten and first grade go?’” (forthcoming) provides an excellent example of these defenses occurring together.

carried in multiple, specific, locations, any given psychological defense can also be carried as a wide spread and deep seated *systemic* pattern. It is important to watch for systemic patterns of psychological defenses because every local occurrence will be easier to deal with once the systemic pattern has been addressed. The first time someone deals with a given psychological defense is a good time to check for a widespread and deep seated pattern behind the immediate situation, but sometimes the systemic pattern does not become apparent immediately. Look especially for a systemic pattern if the same psychological defense pops up over and over again. When you find a systemic pattern of a given psychological defense, make sure to treat it with a full course of systemic “antibiotics.”

Systemic means:

1. Working with the adult core self as opposed to working with internal parts.
2. Addressing the wide spread pattern of the psychological defense as opposed to addressing specific, local occurrences. For example, “I confess this *wide spread and deep seated pattern of denial* in my life,” and “In the name of Jesus, we command that all spiritual strongholds connected to or associated with this *wide spread and deep seated pattern of denial* be torn down now.”
3. Addressing any family tree/generational patterns.

“Full course of antibiotics” means:

1. Confessing the defense in question, renouncing the defense in question, asking the Lord for true repentance regarding the defense in question, and asking the Lord to free you from the defense in question.
2. Going through the prayers to address corresponding spiritual strongholds, demonic spirits, and curses.
3. Looking for others in the family tree with the same psychological defense, and then going through the prayers for generational sins, strongholds, spirits, and curses as appropriate.

See “General Introductory Comments...” for additional comments.

**Common problems:** Comments especially relevant to problems that hinder releasing psychological defenses will be included here. See “General Introductory Comments Regarding Ministry Aids” for additional discussion of each of the common problems that can get in the way of releasing defenses/vows/judgments/self pity/other sins/etc.

1. Core lies getting triggered.
2. Guardian lies: We often find guardian lies hindering the release of judgments. For example, “I will go crazy if I remember,” “I will die if I feel these emotions,” and “I can’t handle these memories” will hinder prayer to release dissociation, repression, and denial.
3. Vows: Defenses are often reinforced by vows. For example, “I will not remember” and “I will not feel” will reinforce dissociation, repression, and denial; “I won’t think about it” will reinforce avoidance; “I will never make another mistake” will protect perfectionism. Finding and releasing corresponding vows will make it much easier to release the defenses.
4. Demonic interference: Any demonic spirits associated with the defense(s) in question will try to block the person and/or internal parts from participating in the prayer. When I am dealing with possible demonic interference hindering release of psychological defenses, I will address my commands to “spirits of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name the defenses in question*), and any other demonic spirits associated with \_\_\_\_\_ (*defenses in question*) in any way”.
5. Avoidance of the whole truth: Our usual comments about “avoidance of the whole truth” do not apply to psychological defenses. If our usual comments *were* applied to psychological

defenses, the text would read: “The person receiving ministry needs to truly “see” how badly she has been hurt before she can fully release the psychological defenses that hinder her from “seeing” the full truth about how badly she has been hurt.” This is obviously a circle. “Avoidance of the whole truth” is the *reason* we need to release our psychological defenses, but we can’t see the whole truth about how badly we have been hurt *before* releasing our defenses.

6. Internal parts choosing to not cooperate: For complete resolution of the defenses in question, any internal parts carrying these defenses must be present, stay connected, and participate in the prayer.

It is ideal to identify and resolve these problems before going through the prayers and commands to address the defenses. Ask the person receiving ministry if she is sure she is ready to release using the defense in question in any way that hinders the Lord’s plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in her life, and then check for any anger, uncertainty, or lack of internal unity. See “General Introductory Comments Regarding Ministry Aids” for additional comments.

**Observe over time:** Our experience is that it is not as easy to tell if the prayers and commands for psychological defenses have “worked” (compared to the prayers and commands to release guilt, bitterness, self pity, etc., where the person experiences immediate and dramatic release), but it is still valuable to observe over time regarding whether the defense(s) in question continue as a significant hindrance in the emotional healing work. If they do, check the common problems and go through the prayers again.

**Reduce or expand the reactive sin target words to facilitate connection:** One of the most important goals for our sample prayers is to help the person receiving ministry to connect experientially/emotionally with the core concepts, and to stay connected throughout the prayer – to stay emotionally connected to the meaning of the prayer as they go through it. Use fewer target words if a longer list is hindering emotional connection by becoming distracting or confusing (for example, just “denial”). Include additional target words if doing so seems to help make and maintain experiential/emotional connection (for example, “denial, avoidance, self deception, and voluntary blindness”). The same principle applies to whether or not to include the reactive sin target words at each point in the prayer. See “General Introductory Comments...” for additional comments.

**Regarding our place in the Theophostic<sup>®5</sup> community, and the place of our ministry aids in Theophostic<sup>®</sup> Ministry:** Dr. Ed Smith, developer of Theophostic<sup>®</sup> Ministry, reports an increasing number of people who seem to be confused about our place in the Theophostic<sup>®</sup> community. We ask that people carefully read and remember our “Home Page” disclaimer (see [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com)) regarding our relationship with Alathia and Dr. Smith. Dr. Smith has specifically mentioned people who think that our ministry aids are a required/necessary part of Theophostic<sup>®</sup> Ministry. We want to be very clear about this: In the explanatory essay (above), we discuss the thoughts, personal experiences, other references, and principles behind the sample prayers and commands at the end of the document. Please consider our discussion, consider for yourself how to interpret the experiences we describe, and then decide whether/how to use these sample prayers and commands. Many have found our ministry aids to be helpful tools as a part of various forms of emotional healing ministry, but it is *not* necessary to use our ministry aids in order to do Theophostic<sup>®</sup> prayer ministry.

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<sup>5</sup> Theophostic Prayer Ministry is a trademark of Dr. Ed Smith and Alathia Ministries, Inc., of Campbellsville, Kentucky.

We also want to be clear that our emotional healing ministry is built around a core of Theophostic<sup>®</sup> principles and techniques, but that we also include “non-Theophostic<sup>®</sup>” material. For example, our material on medical psychiatry, and EMDR<sup>®6</sup>, our material on dealing with curses, spiritual strongholds, generational problems, journaling, spiritual disciplines, and suicide-related phenomena are not a part of what we understand Dr. Smith to define as Theophostic<sup>®</sup> prayer ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> EMDR<sup>®</sup> refers to Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, developed by Francine Shapiro, Ph.D. in 1987. For more information, see [www.emdr.com](http://www.emdr.com); see also “Theophostic<sup>®</sup> & EMDR<sup>®</sup>: FAQs and Common Misunderstandings,” on [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com).

## Psychological Defenses: Sample Prayers and Commands

*Never assume the person receiving ministry is ready to release the defense(s) that you perceive are hindering the healing work. Always ask if she is ready to stop using the defense(s) in any way that hinders the Lord's plan to expose and deal with her sins and wounds. Ask again: "ARE YOU SURE?" If there is any anger, sense of uncertainty, or lack of internal unity regarding letting go of the defense(s), look for guardian lies, core lies being triggered, demonic interference, and internal dissociated parts that are not ready to release the defense(s).*

"Lord Jesus, I thank You that You gave me psychological defenses to help me survive my childhood, but I acknowledge that they are now sin, in that they are hindering Your better plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in my life. I ask Your forgiveness for every way in which my \_\_\_\_\_ (*the defense(s) being addressed*) hinder(s) your plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in my life. I acknowledge that I cannot change my own heart and mind regarding my \_\_\_\_\_. I ask You to give me true repentance – I ask you to give me Your heart, Your mind, and Your truth regarding my \_\_\_\_\_. Lord, I cannot free myself, but I am willing to be freed. I cooperate with Your desire to free me by asking you to free me and by choosing to confess, renounce, and release using \_\_\_\_\_ (*the defense(s) being addressed*) in any way that hinders your plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in my life. I ask you to cleanse me with your blood, freeing me from using \_\_\_\_\_ in any way that hinders your plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in my life.

Lord, please reveal to me every point at which these defenses hinder your better plan to bring my traumatic memories and sin fully into Your light. Show me how to release these defenses that look away from the full magnitude of the trauma and sin in my life. Give me the grace and courage to walk in Your light – to turn towards the truth – so that you may completely and permanently heal these wounds, free me from the associated lies, and deal with the sin in my life.

*Observe over time regarding whether the defense(s) in question continue as a significant hindrance in the emotional healing work. If they do, check the common problems and go through the prayers again.*

*If you feel lead to do so, you can tear down spiritual strongholds (2 Cor. 10), deal with demonic spirits, and break curses:*

"In the name of Jesus, we command that all spiritual strongholds connected to or associated with my \_\_\_\_\_ (*the defense(s) being addressed*) be torn down now."

"In the name of Jesus, we now command all spirits connected to or associated with my \_\_\_\_\_ (*the defense(s) being addressed*) go immediately and directly to the feet of the true Lord Jesus Christ. You will go bound. You will not touch or harm anything or anyone on the way. You will never return and you will never send anything in your place. He will deal with you as He sees fit."

"In the name of Jesus, we command that all curses in any way connected to or associated with my \_\_\_\_\_ (*the defense(s) being addressed*) be broken and rendered powerless, null, and void."