

Inner Studios: Processing Emotions

A guided process

There is such an intimate connection between the way we look at things and what we actually discover. If you can learn to look at yourself and your life in a gentle, creative, and adventurous way, you will be eternally surprised at what you find.”

— John O’Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*

Materials list: a journal or art journal, and a pen. You may want to use watercolors or crayons as well.

Emotions need to be worked through, seen, heard, and honored, without judgment. This exercise is a way to practice the focused skill of paying attention to our emotions and inviting God into the process in a structured way in order for them to be released. Work through this exercise at your own pace.

Instructions

Choose an emotion to be with that most resonates in this moment. It may be anger, fear, shame, sadness, or grief. Alternatively, it may be gratitude, joy, peacefulness, or anticipation. It could be an emotion not named here. It’s okay, if you feel uncertain. Perhaps the emotion of “uncertainty” is your starting point.

How strong is the emotion?

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can journal or draw. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and then note how strong the emotion is on a scale of 1-10. Write down the name of the emotion and the number of its intensity. You can do this creatively with watercolors or even crayons by choosing a color that represents your emotion and noticing the intensity or saturation of the color on your page.

Body/Head/Heart

Now pay attention to three different aspects of yourself, one at a time. Take your time. What is one word that summarizes how you are experiencing the emotion in your:

- *Body/Gut -*
- *Head/Mind -*
- *Heart/Emotions -*

Write down your word for each area in your journal. You can expand this practice by journaling about each of these words, drawing/painting either something representative or abstract, or move your body in a free-style dance that expresses the narrative of the emotion.

May God be present

Now invite God to be present with you. God has a perspective about you and what you are going through. He sees and hears you. He loves and is present with you. Take a few moments of silence to notice God's presence. Ask God to give you a picture or metaphor of your emotion.

What are you noticing?

Use whatever medium you have chosen (journaling, art or movement) and capture whatever you are noticing. You may sense the floodgates open and something extraordinary spills out onto your page OR may sense silence. Neither is wrong. Your authentic experience is what matters here.

Finally

It is important to make time for a reset. Get out into nature, make art, listen to music while you prepare a meal, take a bath or a nap. Do whatever nourishes you. When you are ready share about your experience and what you discovered with a trusted person who knows how to skillfully listen with empathy.