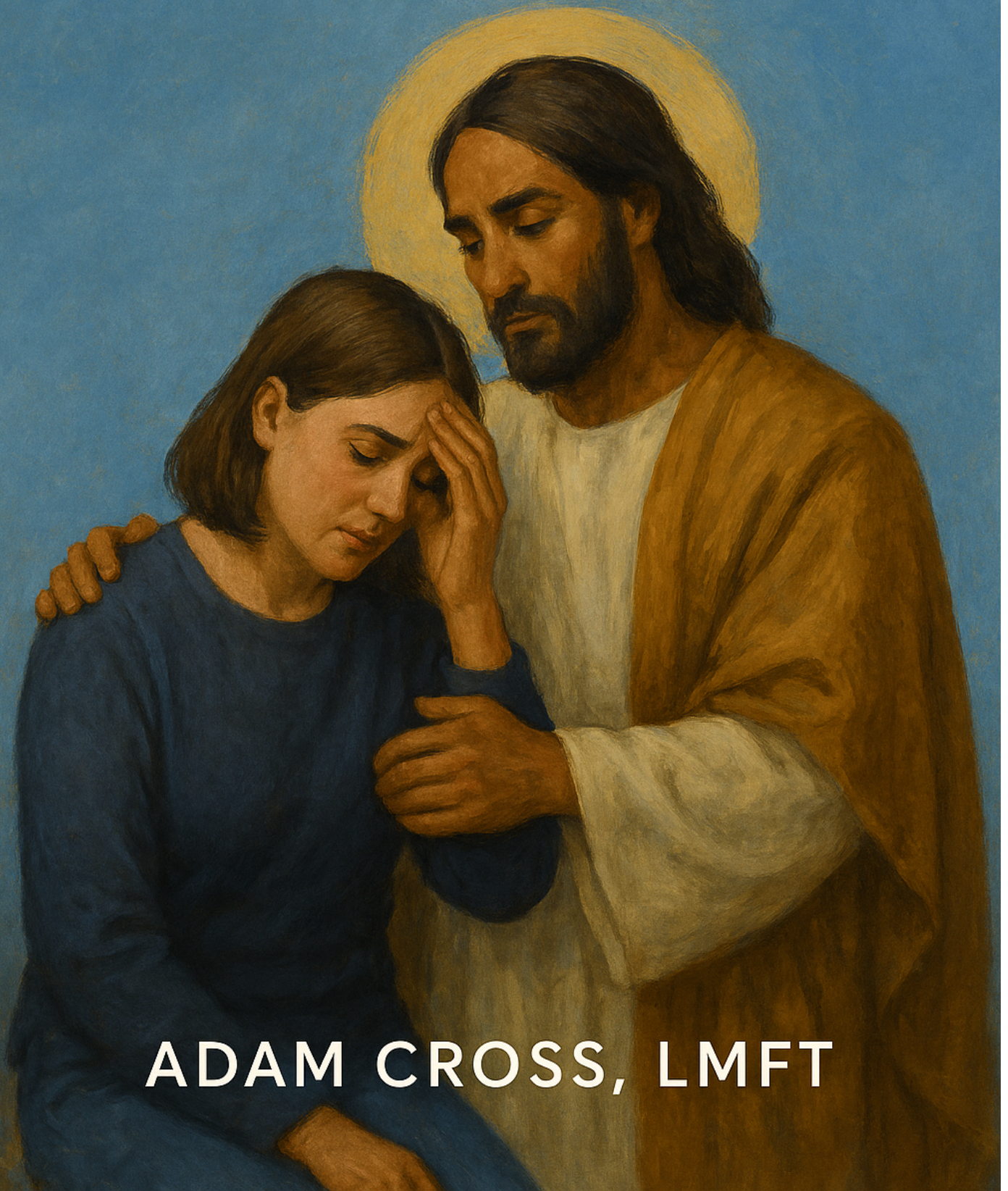


HEALING SCRUPULOSITY



ADAM CROSS, LMFT

Introduction - Beginning the Journey of Healing

Hello, and welcome to this free abridged e-book on Healing Scrupulosity. My name is Adam Cross, and I'm a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Southern California, as well as a former youth minister and director of ministry at my local parish. I'm so grateful you are reading this, and if you are, you probably are familiar with the burden and struggle of religious scrupulosity, either personally or via someone you know and love.

This e-book is a companion and introduction to the Healing Scrupulosity Course available at the catholictherapycenter.com. The full ebook and course contains reflections, tools, and more content, which allows you to dive further into the healing journey. The course includes videos and worksheets which provide a self-guided process with step-by-step help for beginning to understand and heal your struggle with scrupulosity.

This book and course are not substitutes for therapy in anyway, but can be a starting point to really understand what scrupulosity is, and how God is calling us to pick up real tools to begin to heal. As someone who has experienced scrupulosity first-hand, I have found these reminders, tools, and reflections extremely helpful in being able to slow down, breathe, and invite the Good Lord into experiences of fear, doubt, and confusion.

Please feel free to take this book at your own pace, to spend time with the Scripture provided, and to possibly check out the full course to walk through these reflections in more depth with the video as a guide.

Come Holy Spirit!

CHAPTER 1

THE ROOTS OF SCRUPLES



HEALING RELIGIOUS
SCRUPULOSITY FROM A
CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

This is likely no surprise if you have experienced scruples—scrupulosity is rooted in anxiety and fear. It is often a fear surrounded by confusion, doubt, and worry. It might involve wondering if we have sinned, obsessively searching memories for mistakes, or trying to define that fine line between what we think is a venial sin, but could be a mortal sin.

At the root of it all, scrupulosity is based in fear. Our fear and search for certainty amidst confusion can distort many things that are meant to be beautiful reminders of God's love.

Scrupulosity can distort the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and receiving the Holy Eucharist. It can distort our view of self, how we think God and others must view us, and how we view and relate to the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

At the core of scrupulosity, this fear becomes a seemingly endless cycle of self-reliance, trying to obtain certainty that we will be okay. The problem is, this pursuit of certainty concerns intangible and spiritual things, where absolute certainty without

divine revelation is impossible to prove in the way scrupulosity demands.

In examining this fear we have to keep in mind that to be afraid is to be deeply human. Our fallen reality after the original sin in the Garden of Eden involves fearing for our lives at times as a means of survival. Even Jesus, the night before His Passion, experienced profound anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. It wasn't an anxious distrust in the Father's plan, but a real anticipation of the suffering He was taking on in this broken world. That same tension—striving for trust amid fear—is something we often carry in scrupulosity. Fear is a natural response in our fallen world, where suffering and evil exist. There are things we do need to be afraid of, but God invites us not to live in this fear. Fear at its core is a desire to protect ourselves and what is good, but often times it can feel out of control and overwhelming.

At the core of our Catholic faith, God is calling us to live in abundance, which Christ came to provide. This means acknowledging that while fear exists, God is giving us real tools and faith to live and thrive in hope and love.

Scrupulosity, as a dynamic of fear and self-protection, thrives on over-checking and over-analyzing moral decisions, often obsessing: *Was this a sin? Was it mortal? Should I go to confession? Should I still receive the Eucharist?* While the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a beautiful and tangible gift from God, scrupulosity can distort the experience by turning it into a source of complete dread. We begin to ask not out of love, but out of fear: *Where am I with God? Did I cross a line? Will I be rejected by love itself? Will I be condemning myself?*

This pattern reveals the obsessive-compulsive cycle in action (OCD) with an often intrusive thought (obsession) causing distress, and a behavior or mental action (compulsion) offering temporary relief. The obsession might be fear of mortal sin; the

compulsion, repeated confession—not necessarily out of sorrow, but out of panic, or the complete avoidance of the sacraments.

Going to confession can become a process of self-preservation with a mindset of *just in case*, rather than a trust in God's mercy or true repentance. This cycle might also involve compulsively checking our memories for missed sins, or even listing out our sins to every minor detail. Scrupulosity can take on different forms with various obsessions, fears, and compulsions, but it is all rooted in fear which creates a cycle of self-preservation and self-reliance where we try to have control over our own safety and salvation, rather than trusting in the power, mercy, and perfect justice of the Lord.

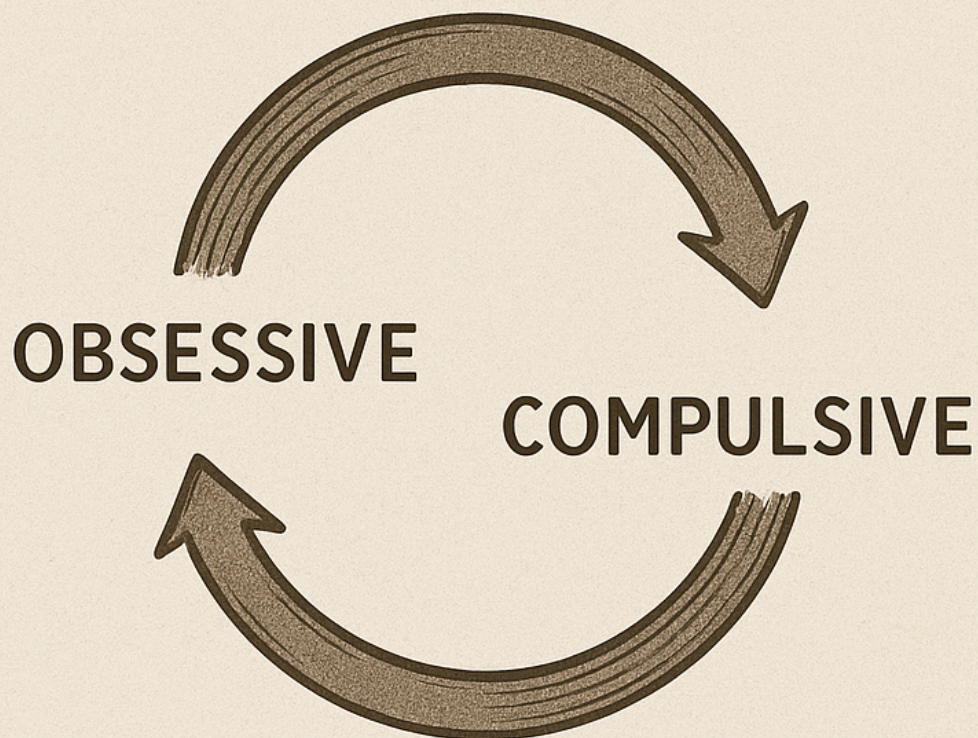
In recognizing the OCD cycle at play, we also must remember that scrupulosity is not an intentional or necessarily conscious decision to not trust God, but being rooted in fear, is primarily a result of our wounded human nature. We were not made to be separated from God and this ache of separation—a result of

original sin—is at the core of many of our spiritual and emotional anxieties. This means that scrupulosity is a product of our broken world, a wound from sin and suffering, and we can approach this wound with the compassion, gentleness, and patience that the Lord has for us. This reminder also means that your scrupulosity is not your identity.

As we approach healing scrupulosity, we can lean into the Gospel truth - the Good News. Your identity is in being a beloved son or daughter of the Father. That's it. Nothing else defines you. When we rest in this truth, we can begin to detach from the anxiety and observe it, rather than being ruled by it. Naming your obsessions and compulsions is the first step toward freedom as a beloved son or daughter, with whom the Father is well pleased.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING THE OBSESSIVE & COMPULSIVE DYNAMIC BEHIND SCRUPULOSITY



In this chapter, we will explore how scrupulosity operates within the Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) cycle. Understanding this model can help you to better identify patterns of fear and develop tools to respond with peace and trust in God's mercy.

What is OCD?

At its core, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder involving two main parts: obsessions and compulsions. Let's explore what that means in a way that connects with the everyday experience of scrupulosity.

Obsessions

Obsessions are repetitive, unwanted thoughts, questioning, urges, or mental images that cause significant distress or fear. They're not just worries—these thoughts can feel intrusive and often go against what we believe or value.

For someone with scrupulosity, these obsessions might sound like:

- *“Did I forget to confess a mortal sin?”*
- *“Was that thought a sin?”*
- *“Did I receive the Eucharist unworthily?”*
- *“Did I blaspheme?”*

These thoughts are usually not chosen. In fact, the person desperately wants to get rid of them, but they keep returning, often louder each time.

Compulsions

Compulsions are the things we do—either physically or mentally—to try to *temporarily* relieve the anxiety and fear caused by the obsession or intrusive thought.

With scrupulosity, compulsions might include:

- Repeatedly going to confession for the same sins
- Mentally reviewing every thought or action
- Avoiding the Eucharist out of fear

- Seeking constant reassurance from priests or loved ones
- Excessive prayer out of fear, not love

These behaviors are often not connected in a reasonable way to the fear we're trying to manage—or they're acted on to an excessive degree. A person might know it doesn't "make sense" to do these things, but might feel unable to stop it. While we might understand the underlying objective truth and theology of not having sinned, the feeling of having sinned or guilt might still be so overwhelming that we feel compelled to act on the feeling, rather than what we know to be logical.

Time and Impact

OCD becomes a clinical issue when these obsessions and compulsions:

- Take up a significant amount of time (usually more than an hour a day),

- Cause serious distress and impairment, making it harder to function in daily life, relationships, or faith.

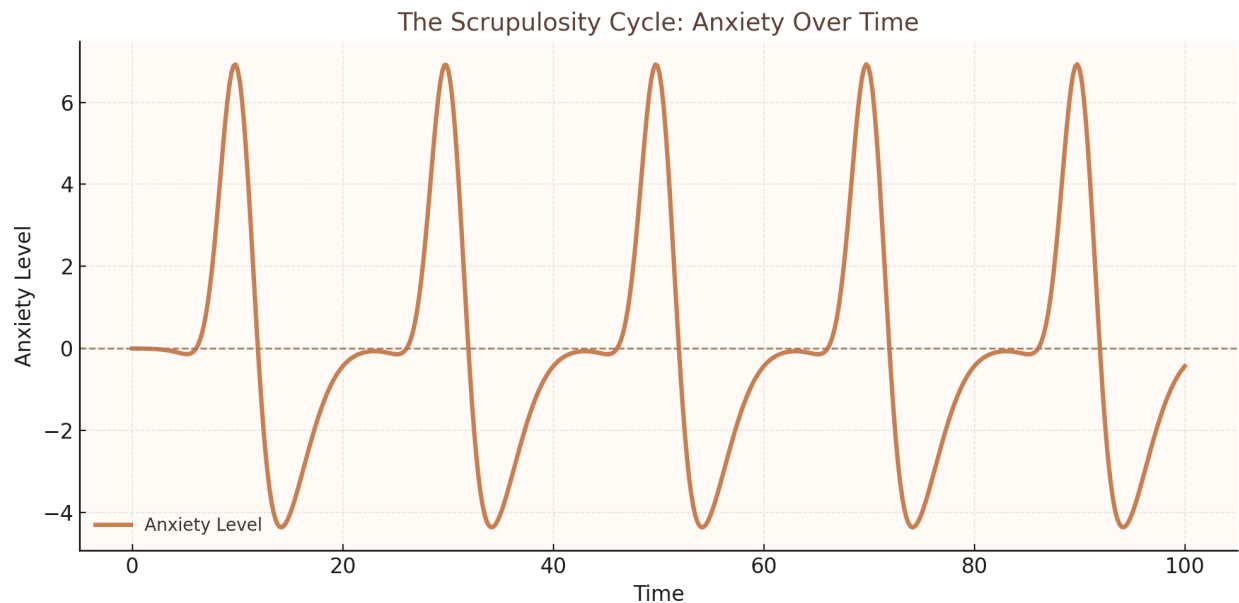
Intrusive Thoughts Are Not Sins

Blasphemous, sexual, or violent intrusive thoughts can be deeply disturbing and are often *common* with experiences of scruples. They can be any thought that pops into your head that is unwanted, and causes distress. Remember, you are not your thoughts. Intrusive thoughts are not sins. They don't reflect your will or heart and there are real tools to recognize and navigate them when they pop into your mind.

The Fear Cycle: Obsession, Anxiety, Compulsion

The graph below depicts the OCD cycle. The vertical axis represents your anxiety level; the horizontal, time. When a triggering event or thought arises—such as thinking "Was that a mortal sin?"—your anxiety spikes. In response, you may perform a compulsion, like confessing or repeating prayers. Your

anxiety drops temporarily, but soon the obsession resurfaces.



The cycle repeats, and over time, the habit strengthens.

The problem? Compulsions offer only temporary relief. The next time, your anxiety may rise even faster. You might walk out of confession only to fear, "Did I say everything? What if I missed something?" Your fear escalates, and you remain caught in a loop.

Here's the pattern:

- Intrusive thought → Anxiety → Compulsive behavior (e.g., prayer, checking, denial of intent)

Responding to the thought with fear and fear-based behaviors only reinforces this cycle. The alternative? Acknowledge the thought, name the fear, and allow yourself to sit with the discomfort—with Jesus beside you.

Exposure and Faith

So you may be asking — how do I sit with the fear with the Lord, especially when it feels so unbearable? To sum it up, it's called exposure. Exposure therapy teaches: do the opposite of what fear demands. If you fear you've sinned and want to confess again immediately—pause. Don't act out of fear. The fear reaction is the compulsion to avoid.

Jesus said, "Be not afraid"— over and over again in Scripture. His love casts out fear. We also can keep in mind that we never have to face fears on our own. Exposure therapy is best done with a therapist, and we can also enlist the help of spiritual directors, friends, and family to ground us and help us navigate the discomfort of sitting with and through any fears/obsessions.

With the right support and tools, you can gently resist the compulsion and find that your anxiety eventually fades on its own and we will review how to begin doing this practically later in this book.

What OCD Is Not

It's important to understand that OCD is not caused by weak faith, and it's not simply being "too devout" either. OCD is a mental health cycle and condition that affects how our brains process fear, threat, and uncertainty. And just like someone with asthma struggles to breathe during an attack, someone with OCD struggles to feel spiritually "at peace" even when they are in a state of grace but are having high anxiety.

OCD is also not a punishment or a sign of spiritual failure—it's a cross that many carry, and like all crosses, it can be carried with Jesus.

Even great saints like St. Therese of Lisieux struggled with scruples, but saw it as an opportunity to further lean into and

trust God's mercy. OCD is a real cross to bear, and it is also an opportunity, amidst real struggle, to discover the great love and mercy of the Lord as He calls you deeper into intimacy with Him as His beloved child.

Lifeboats: Coping That Once Helped

Believe it or not, some compulsions actually started as life saving "lifeboats". These are survival strategies during storms in our lives that at one point helped us to survive. Imagine you're in a flood and might drown and someone offers you a lifeboat. Of course you jump in! But if, years later, you're dragging that same lifeboat into a job interview, it's not helpful anymore and it's in the way.

Our coping strategies may have helped us endure trauma or fear in the past, but they may now hinder growth. It's time to thank them—and let them go. In terms of scrupulosity, this might mean that at some point in your life it was helpful, even life saving, to dissect and repeatedly check your behaviors or

relational standings. Scrupulosity in many ways be a fruit of past survival, that at one point kept you afloat, but has now turned sour as it focuses in on your spiritual life and standing with God. Understanding these origins also helps us to acknowledge compulsions and gently, slowly, let them go, turning to new and healthier forms of coping.

Hope in Healing

While OCD has been misunderstood or dismissed in the past, the good news is that healing is very much possible. With the right tools—such as therapy, spiritual direction, integrating healthy daily habits and sometimes medication—many people find freedom and peace. As Catholics, we are incredibly blessed to have the psychological, spiritual, and tangible sacramental realities working in tandem for healing.

In treating scrupulosity as OCD, we are better able to acknowledge and accept scruples for what it is. With this acknowledgement of what we are facing, as a cycle of fear, we

can recall that God is not the author of confusion or fear. He is the *God of peace* (1 Cor 14:33). God desires to walk with you through every step of this journey toward clarity, freedom, and healing.

CHAPTER 3

FAULTY GOD-IMAGES?



Whether it's thinking of God as a heavenly accountant tallying our mistakes, or viewing God as Santa who only comes around once a year, we all have faulty and limited images of God. We can easily lose sight of who God truly is, as we unintentionally try to stuff Him into a box in our minds, attempting to make sense of our daily experiences and struggles. Scripture and Tradition, as Divine Revelation, shows us that fundamentally God is a Father who wants to heal and restore you. God is a Father of abundance, lacking nothing, with perfect mercy and justice, and He longs for us to know His gentle gaze and care amidst struggles with scrupulosity and the crosses we carry.

Cracked Window

Scrupulosity is often fed by distorted views of God that we compile over time. Do you see God as a strict judge, a cosmic accountant, or a distant deity only interested in rule-following? These images can fuel anxiety. These distorted images also most often come from our early life experiences—especially

relationships with parents or authority figures. A critical parent may shape your idea of God as someone impossible to please, or someone who is easily mad at you based on your daily productivity. An emotionally distant caregiver as a child might leave you to believe that God is absent or just doesn't care that much about your daily thoughts, feelings and struggles.

Not Made for That

Typically our encounters with sin, suffering, and evil in the world leave a distorted view of the Lord. When we encounter any of these things, which we are not made for, we can often walk away with a faulty belief about who God is, and who we are. Evil in any form distorts what is true, and aims primarily to attack the fundamental realities of who God is as our Father, and who we are as His child. In the face of scrupulosity, this could feel like God is just waiting or wanting to send us to hell. It could feel like God is not a loving Father, but a masochist who loves to punish. But this isn't the God of Scripture. In Scripture we

receive that God *is love*. We have countless reminders of God extending His mercy to those who are sick, outcast, possessed, and even caught in sin. In the story of the woman caught in adultery, we have the reminder that the woman was *actually caught*. She wasn't the woman who *might* have been adulterous, but had been. Jesus' response to this woman, even without her request for forgiveness in front of the Pharisees, is to not cast judgment but to readily forgive her sins. In a very similar light we have the well known Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), where despite the tremendous offense done to the father, the father welcomes the son back with a ring for his finger and a fattened calf to celebrate after running to embrace him.

Not a Tame Lion

As C.S. Lewis reminds in his Chronicles of Narnia, with the Christ-figure Aslan the Lion, God is not tame. We cannot simply put God into a box and we are called to continuously contemplate on the great mysteries of who God is. While

scrupulosity distorts our views of God, the Church reveals to us who He is and how He loves us. Scripture allows us to chew on, and encounter the living Word, and the saints give us models of how to follow, pursue, and imitate Christ. This encounter with God to reshape our God images happens through Scripture, prayer, the Sacraments, receiving the Holy Eucharist, friendships, Bible Studies, supportive and trusting relationships, therapy and more.

To Err is Human

A large part of rethinking and reshaping our distorted God-images is also examining with curiosity and compassion how our relationships with our parents and caregivers have shaped us. This includes looking more closely at how our early attachments shaped our views on love, God, relationships, worth, and our own identity. Spending time with these attachments and influences allows us to better see what we are

projecting onto God, that really belongs to our broken mothers, fathers, grandparents, teachers, coaches, and even priests.

As we examine our attachments, we can also highlight any obstacles we have to growing in intimacy with God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and take these obstacles to therapy, spiritual direction, and prayer.

Reflecting on Your God Image

Ask yourself:

- Which caregivers/parents most shaped how I see God?
- Do I feel closer to Jesus, the Father, or the Holy Spirit? Why?
- What emotional blocks keep me from trusting God fully?

It's okay if your connection to God the Father is strained. Start with Jesus. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your healing.

CHAPTER 4

NAVIGATING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS & EMOTIONS



There's no surprise here when I say, the mental and emotional experience of scrupulosity can be one of terror, hopelessness, criticalness and fear. Negative or intrusive thoughts can seemingly rule our days as we carry the cross of scruples. Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are deeply connected. Learning to examine this connection is essential in managing scrupulosity.

Negative and intrusive thoughts around scrupulosity usually come with negative and intense emotions. These emotions can especially be fear of where we stand with God, if we're sinning, or if we are making a mistake or not doing something we ought to be doing. Our emotions are closely linked with the thoughts we entertain and the underlying beliefs we hold onto. Beginning to acknowledge the underlying beliefs we have about ourselves, others, and God, allows us to transform how we think, what thoughts we entertain, and in turn, change how we feel and act.

The Emotional Toll of Scrupulous Thoughts

While our thoughts within scrupulosity can be terror, deep stress, and doubt, we can keep in mind the good news that we are able to look at our thoughts in a new way. We are able to name our thoughts—and while we can't completely stop every thought that comes into our mind, we are able to navigate them with real peace from the Lord.

The “Pink Elephant” Problem

If you think about the saying, “don’t think about pink elephants,” what usually happens? Well, you probably just pictured pink elephants. In a similar way, when we fixate and focus on negative thoughts—especially intrusive thoughts—they actually become more cemented in our mind, even if our goal is to get rid of them. With scrupulosity and OCD, the more we fixate, question, and check our thoughts, the more these fears become cemented in our lives and affect our daily emotions and behaviors.

So What Do I Do?

So can we change our thoughts and patterns? The answer is yes—but not by forcing them away. Trying to “kick out” thoughts often backfires, increasing anxiety and reinforcing the thought itself. The more we try to get the pink elephants out of our head, the more we are devoting our attention and energy to them.

A Mindfulness Approach to Scrupulosity

As we begin to look at our thoughts and emotions around religious scrupulosity and OCD, we can most importantly take a mindfulness approach. A mindfulness approach is simply looking at our thoughts and emotions with curiosity, with openness, without an agenda. We can examine our thoughts and emotions as data, with no judgment, and notice like a child would, what is simply there.

If we can approach our thoughts—even if they're terrifying at times and overwhelming—with curiosity and openness, we can begin to say: *Ah, that is there. That is in my head.* We can even say

I hate that thought... but that is not my identity. That doesn't necessarily define me. That isn't all of me. But we are not forcing it away.

Trains & Clouds

Imagine these negative and intrusive thoughts are trains in a train station or clouds in the sky. You sit on a bench at the station, or lay down in a field looking at the sky. Thoughts arrive, pause, and depart. You don't have to jump on every train or chase every cloud. Scrupulosity often urges you to board every distressing thought that pops into your awareness, but healing means staying seated on the bench, or lying on the grass, being present with the Lord. The more we try to push a cloud out of the sky, or a train out of the station, the more exhausted we become. With the grace of God, we can be in the present moment, naming the hard thoughts and emotions that are present, but then letting them slowly pass by.

As we notice our negative thoughts and emotions, we can stay mindful, being intentional and present with the Lord. We can notice thoughts without judgment. Practice neutrality: *That's just a thought. I don't have to act on it.* And if we want, we can later jot down the thought or theme that keeps resurfacing to process it more with a therapist or spiritual director.

Responding vs. Reacting

With this distance from our thoughts, we also are beginning to learn how to respond to our them appropriately. If we are simply accepting thoughts as truth, engaging, and entertaining every thought and emotion that pops into our head, we are reacting—not responding—to our thoughts. Living in this way produces a compulsive and reactive way of living, not an intentional way of life built on charity, patience and slowing down.

Transforming Our Interior Experience

This process of slowing down with curiosity, and mindfully accepting our thoughts to choose *how to respond with the grace*

of God, allows us to completely transform our interior experience into something that is more peaceful.

As we allow thoughts, trains, clouds to be there, we are acknowledging what is, and being present with the Lord. These first steps are so fundamental and allow you to move into the next step of gracefully responding to your thoughts, which then allow us to experience emotional and behavioral shifts. This process looks like the following:

Naming, Stopping, Replacing

1. Name the thought — simply recognize what is there.
2. Stop—don't engage with it. Acknowledge it and let it pass.

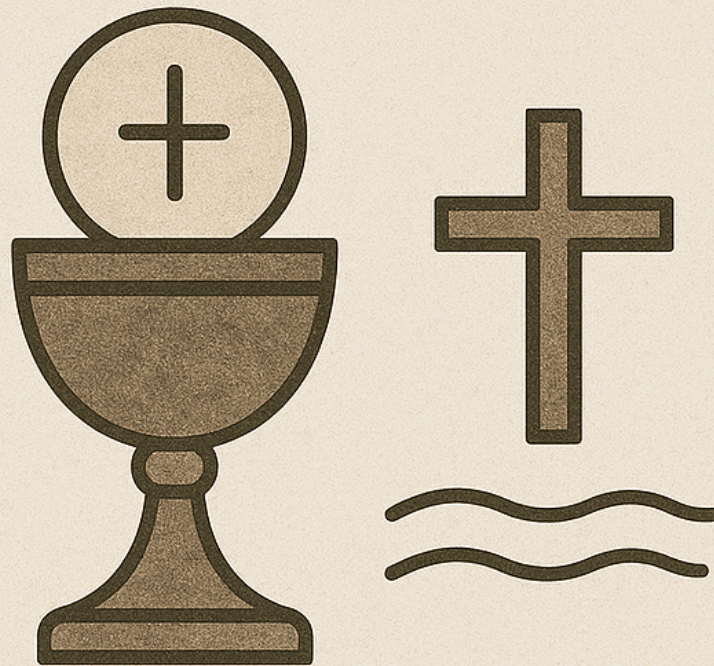
Come back to the present moment and even use your breath or a prayer to be with the Lord and ground yourself in the here and now.

3. Replace — If this thought isn't helpful to entertain, what is? Refocus on a thought or truth that is helpful. Scripture,

prayer, or a healthy distraction can reorient your mind as well.

CHAPTER 5

THE SACRAMENTS AND SCRUPULOSITY



Now, let's turn to some Good News. God has given us the sacraments as powerful tools for our salvation and healing. Through Christ, the sacraments are real, tangible encounters with God's mercy and love. Sadly, scrupulosity can twist these sacred gifts into sources of dread, completely missing their true purpose. For those struggling with scrupulosity, the sacraments may seem like anything but good news at times, often becoming reminders of shame or fear, but healing scrupulosity means rediscovering the true grace and transformative power that the sacraments offer.

Process, Not Perfection

Those struggling with scrupulosity and OCD may find confession and receiving the Eucharist to be big triggers of fear and anxiety. They may trigger anxious thoughts and feelings such as:

- *I will confess poorly or say something wrong*
- *I forgot a mortal sin! My absolution didn't count*

- *I will be yelled at in confession for making a mistake*
- *I will be judged by those around me if I don't receive communion at Mass*
- *I will receive unworthily if I receive without certainty that my sins have been forgiven*

With thoughts and feelings like these and more, Catholics can end up living in fear of the very sacraments that are meant to be the means of their freedom and salvation. Struggling with scrupulosity can lead to approaching the Sacraments thinking we need to be perfect in order to receive them, instead of remembering that the Church is a hospital for the sick, a place for sinners to find refuge, mercy, and help.

Tips for Scrupulosity in Confession

If you are approaching confession with scruples, here are a few tips to navigate it well without compulsivity and fear:

- **Validate your fears** - confessing your sins is never easy for anyone, don't judge yourself for having anxiety about the process. It's natural to feel nervous and we can remind ourselves that God is even helping us to make a good confession. He knows our sins already and isn't surprised by them. He longs to pour out His mercy upon us as we bring them to Him.
- **Conduct a short examination of conscience** - using an app or print out form, walk through an examination of conscience for no more than 10-15 minutes. Keep it brief and, if possible, think about walking through it with a spiritual director who knows about your struggle with scrupulosity. The goal is not to ruminate or obsess about the questions or your memories, but to simply answer the questions on the examination.
- **Inform the priest about your scrupulosity** - let the priest guide you with an understanding of what you are struggling with. It can greatly help if you disclose to your confessor at the

start of your confession that you struggle with the cross of OCD & scrupulosity.

- **The Game Plan** - have Scripture verses or helpful reminders ready for before, during, and after confession to remember what the sacrament is all about. Give yourself helpful notes and reframes to remember that the sacrament is there to provide God's endless mercy, even in the face of our own brokenness. Be prepared with helpful reminders, saint quotes, and Scripture that tell of how God is pursuing you, helping you to make a good confession, and is delighting in you as a beloved child. Think of this as your survival/coping plan for navigating this great sacrament with scrupulosity.
- **Lean into uncertainty** - remember that the Church clearly teaches that we cannot for *certain* know if we are in a state of grace or not, but we have faith in God and His sacraments. Scrupulosity often tries to obtain certainty, which is a level of human control. God is asking us to show up and do your best,

He doesn't withhold mercy and grace if we make a mistake. We can also turn to the wisdom of the Church and look at the conditions for a mortal sin. The goal here isn't to ruminate or check repeatedly, but if we are finding ourselves stuck on what to confess, we can reference these fundamental components of a mortal sin

- Grave matter (serious sin, e.g., against the Ten Commandments)
- Full knowledge that it is wrong
- Deliberate consent to do it anyway

If one of these is missing, the sin is not mortal. Knowing these requirements helps us challenge the catastrophizing thoughts that often fuel scrupulosity. It can help us to recognize where we might be generalizing or painting all mistakes as mortal sins. Even reading over these requirements can bring up fears, and confusion within scrupulosity. Again, the struggle of scrupulosity is often one seeking certainty, but we can lean into

the mercy of God, use our best judgement, and act with faith instead of seeking to control. Faith often involves risk, and God sees and is understanding of any confusion you may have. He is asking us to go to Him and to trust in His mercy, even if we lack certainty.

- **Stick with one confessor** - don't "priest-hop". Staying with the same priest or spiritual director helps because:
 - They will better understand your experiences of scrupulosity over time
 - They can guide you, help you discern what's truly a mortal sin, and offer consistency
 - They can help you recognize what is fear-based and compulsive, and where you can grow in trust to sit with the discomfort of not having certainty
 - They provide an ongoing, loving, tangible experience of Christ as they are in *persona Christi*

- **See Jesus (in the confessional)** - confession is about your relationship with God, not about a legal checklist. The priest is in *persona Christi* and is the tangible expression of Christ to us in this sacrament. Confession isn't a legalistic disclosure of faults, but a relationship with the God who loves you enough to die for you. As Pope Francis said: *it is not God who tires of forgiving, it is us who tire of asking for forgiveness*. Confession is about a personal God longing to heal us in a tangible way, lean into the human experience of confession. Focus on the priest's voice, take a breath, and receive the gift of absolution. Stay present in body, mind, and soul, in this beautiful sacrament.
- **The After-plan** - after confession, have a plan in place to process what has happened. Whether this is taking some deep breaths and noticing your body, praying with a Psalm, going for a walk as you do penance, or calling a good friend to touch base. Create a self-care plan after the sacrament to process and acknowledge how you are feeling and thinking.

Perfect Recall/Contrition?

In struggling with scrupulosity, many also share the fears of

- *What if I forget a sin?*
- *What if I don't feel sorry enough?*
- *What if I don't feel forgiven?*

It can be extremely comforting to remember that the Church encourages us in that if we honestly forget something in confession (not intentionally), God still forgives us. So many people struggling with going to confession carry this fear of forgetting something. The Church teaches that God does not withhold forgiveness because we forgot a detail out of our own limited imperfections. Imagine someone struggling with dementia, or memory issues, does God forsake them because of their lack of recall? Of course not! God is perfectly merciful and just, He sees our hearts more clearly than we do, and the Church teaches that even if we realize we genuinely forgot a sin, we can

bring it to confession next time with trust in His understanding. We can also keep in mind that absolution and God's mercy are not emotions. They often bring peace, but God's mercy is a reality, and not just a feeling to be had. We might still experience anxiety, stress, or any other negative emotions while simultaneously receiving God's real mercy. We don't need to check or compare our feelings, but we can trust in the sacramental reality.

Struggling to remember, or being anxious about the quality of our confession, doesn't invalidate our absolution and we have to remember that God's mercy is never dependent on our perfect memory or errors. Mercy is a gift from God and He is calling us to rely more and more on Him through this great sacrament, rather than our perfect cognition and feelings.

Shame vs. Peace

I'll never forget my pastor's homily one Sunday on confession, where he passionately told our parish that if a priest ever makes

you feel ashamed of yourself in confession, you have every right to walk out. The sacrament of reconciliation is a place of healing and peace, not condemnation or shame. Our Church is a hospital for sinners, not a courtroom, and if we feel overwhelmed, judged, or criticized amidst making a confession, we are absolutely free to find another priest who will understand the struggle and patiently journey with you in *persona Christi*.

Priests are human too and sometimes forget what it means to struggle with scrupulosity. If you have had a negative experience with a priest in confession, you are not alone. Sometimes priests are struggling themselves, are just having a bad day, or lack the insight to help you amidst your real struggle with OCD and scrupulosity. It is important to pursue spiritual fathers who are patient and understanding as we take steps to heal scrupulosity.

Tangible Love

Remember again that each sacrament involves tangible, physical signs of invisible grace. In confession, you hear the words of

absolution. In the Eucharist, you receive Christ's true body and blood. These aren't mere rituals—they are personal encounters with Jesus Christ.

God does not wait for you to be perfect to meet you in the sacraments. He runs to you, like the father of the Prodigal Son. The second your heart turns toward Him, He's already drawing near.

When approaching the sacraments keep your focus on the love of Christ, not the legalism of a judge. Seek to grow in relationship with love itself, trusting, risking uncertainty, in the face of your fears. At times this will absolutely mean discomfort of exposing yourself to risk, but that is where we trust in God as a Father to catch and hold us. We also never have to navigate this by ourselves and can lean on others each step of the way as we approach the Sacraments.

Abandonment & Communion

Scrupulosity can also lead some to avoid Holy Communion out of fear. If you're uncertain about a potential sin but didn't willfully commit a grave sin, you are encouraged to *still* receive if you struggle with scrupulosity. Let the Eucharist heal and even illuminate you. Looking back at the requirements for mortal sin, we can remind ourselves that God alone knows completely our culpability, and the Holy Spirit convicts us for repentance and transformation. If we are confused and doubting our behavior within scrupulosity, God is inviting us to lean into trust and mercy as we do our best to discern. If there is doubt, most priests and spiritual directors will encourage those struggling with scrupulosity to *still* receive the Eucharist, knowing that Christ will only help and heal the struggle.

Conclusion

Healing from scrupulosity is more than possible. Jesus walks with you in this process—not demanding perfection, but offering presence. He longs for you to know Him personally, intimately, and through His Church. The cross you carry, He carries too. Trust that in the real struggle of your scrupulosity, with each step you take, God has resurrection and plan for peace in store.

For the full ebook and access to the videos, worksheets, and reflections included in the Healing Scrupulosity Course, please visit catholictherapycenter.com to subscribe.