

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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## ***Into the Light of Grace***

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**T**he people in twelve-step programs are often referred to as friends of Bill W., no matter which program they attend: Overeaters Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, many others, or the original that Bill W. cofounded in 1935, Alcoholics Anonymous.

Twelve-step programs share many other characteristics, including an essential, core practice that people in the programs can't sidestep or ignore. It has to be faced head-on or the programs can't work.

The essential practice? The addict must come to an understanding and acknowledge that the addictive behavior that's robbing him or her of a healthy life is powerful. It's so powerful that the person struggling with addictive behavior must admit and accept that the behavior is more powerful than the individual person. It can't be willed or prayed away, managed, or controlled. The behavior can't be satisfied, satiated, filled, or completed. It always needs more. And even when it takes everything that a person has, it'll still demand more than the person has to give. It's that strong.

It's difficult to accept that something within a person can be stronger than the person. Our Christian faith teaches that we can be strong-willed and highly principled, and through our efforts we can be strengthened by grace. That's true, but a strong will doesn't overcome the power of addiction or the power of a particular



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SHUTTERSTOCK

behavior that's not freely chosen but is rather knit into the core of an individual's being. It doesn't matter whether the cause is DNA, a chemical imbalance, patterned behavior, diminished capacity, or whatever. "It" possesses an immense power, and the addict has to accept it for what it is.

People in the past might have identified this kind of power as the devil. For those with limited or no understanding of biology, physiology, psychology, and other pertinent and related sciences, identifying such manifestations as the devil made sense. Today there's less inclination to pin behavioral sources on an outside force. Behaviors and the suffering that accompanies them are mostly recognized for what they are.

Instruction for this modern way of thinking has come from the accumulation of untold suffering through the ages by countless people who have been burdened with harmful behaviors that have robbed them of the fullness of life. The suffering that goes with the behaviors has not been in vain. Look at the people in the various twelve-step programs who have named and accepted the power of their experience and who have responded by living a program that has worked for millions.

When people who have suffered by themselves join together as a community and come to an understanding of what they need in order to feel some sense of peace, that's grace. When suffering is brought into the light, people are able to learn how to identify and accept what's happening. Remember, Jesus often invited his followers from darkness into light so they could witness the truth and heal if they needed to get better.

In order for those who suffer with scrupulosity to heal, they should follow these steps, which are similar to twelve-step practices: acknowledge scrupulosity's power, admit they can't overcome it alone and in isolation, and have the courage to bring the disorder into the light and seek the necessary help. There are no shortcuts, no exceptions, and they are difficult steps to take.

An additional challenge that Catholics with scrupulosity face is the sacrament of reconciliation.

For them, a private confession can be a source of pain, anxiety, and suffering. The sacrament is intended to offer forgiveness of sin, accepting and celebrating the love that Jesus has for us, but the confessional tends to isolate people with scrupulosity, making confession a potentially harmful spiritual practice for them. The privacy of the church confessional doesn't always help people with scrupulosity.

Does this mean I'm counseling that you should avoid confession if you suffer with scrupulosity? Not at all. Instead, avoid the confessional and have a face-to-face meeting with your confessor in the light, out of the darkness. Engage in real dialogue and have a relationship with

another person who's willing to journey with you on the path to learning how to manage this disorder.

The practices of the friends of Bill W. can help the readers of this newsletter understand that scrupulosity is powerful and can't be confronted in isolation. Twelve-steppers know that real spiritual help is gained by breaking old patterns and emerging from isolation into the light of grace. In that light, seekers find confidence and God, who is there at every moment to guide everyone who reaches out. And that, friends, is grace. ✨

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# Finding Our Way to God

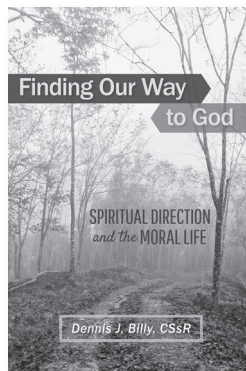
**P**raying in truth has to do with opening our hearts and revealing ourselves to God as we really are. It means having the courage to look inside ourselves and confront the various masks and self-deceptions we find. It means being willing to risk baring our souls to God so God might bare his soul to us. Intimacy with the divine first requires intimacy with self. We can't communicate with God in truth if we're unwilling to know the truth about ourselves.

Coming to an intimate knowledge of ourselves is no easy task. Most of us can't go it alone and are in dire need of help. We find facing our inner wants and insecurities much too threatening. Left to our own resources, many of us would end up rationalizing away our fears and discounting our deepest hopes about who we are and want to become. Spiritual direction seeks to remedy this. It provides the help we need to confront ourselves and open our hearts to God. It does so by gently helping us recognize and then listen to the voice of the Spirit manifested in the nitty-gritty circumstances of our lives. More often than not, that voice is found in the small whispering sound that can only be heard in the solitude of our hearts.

Spiritual direction seeks to settle our hearts so we can rest in this solitude and become ourselves in our faith. As a helping relationship between two people, it focuses on both conscious and unconscious interactions with the divine. It helps us

to sift through the conflicting, often troublesome personal narratives vying for our attention so we can make responsible judgments about where we have come from and where we're being called. It pays special heed to our life of prayer, helping us to discern the true self from the false and authentic prayer from its paltry imitation.

The ultimate goal of spiritual direction is to help us pray in truth. To pray in truth is to pray in the Spirit, the re-creative presence of God that hovers over and revives the primal forces within us. We know we're praying in the Spirit when our lives manifest its various gifts and fruits (see Isaiah 11:2-3 and Galatians 5:22-23). Spiritual direction helps us to identify these spiritual riches and allow them to do their quiet work within us. That work concerns an ongoing, gradual process of divinization that draws us into a deeper participation in the eternal celebration of love within the Godhead. ✨



Source: Excerpted from *Finding Our Way to God: Spiritual Direction in the Moral Life* by Dennis Billy, CSSR (product code 828034).

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# Mailbox

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**Q.** *The other day I hissed God's name under my breath in a moment of frustration. I understand that there was no forethought in this action and that forethought is required for sin, but does that rule apply to this sin? I'm confused. Please help.*

**A.** Yes, of course it applies to this action. Sin is not something that comes upon you unaware, sneaking up on you, trapping you, and then letting the consequences rain down upon you. Do you think that God is in his heaven looking down on you and playing a “gotcha” game? Sin is deliberate, not accidental. I think people often confuse this because legal penalties can be incurred accidentally. “I didn’t see the light turn red, but I ran the light nonetheless and have to pay the fine.” A legal penalty is not the same thing as sin.

**Q.** *I'm tormented by the thought of purgatory and the suffering that awaits me. I read that even St. Faustina had to go to purgatory even though she tried her whole life to be faithful to God. If she had to burn, I can see no escape for me. It terrifies me.*

**A.** No one knows anything about purgatory, and all the stories about purgatory—including the stories about the saints and purgatory—are exactly that: stories. They may be creative, they may be illustrative, they may even be inspirational, but they are stories, not statements of fact based on observable and recordable evidence. Change your reading material and read something that’s more hopeful and helpful instead of disruptive and terrifying. You will be happier.

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