



Unnecessary Baggage

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"I wonder how much of what weighs me down is not mine to carry."

Aditi

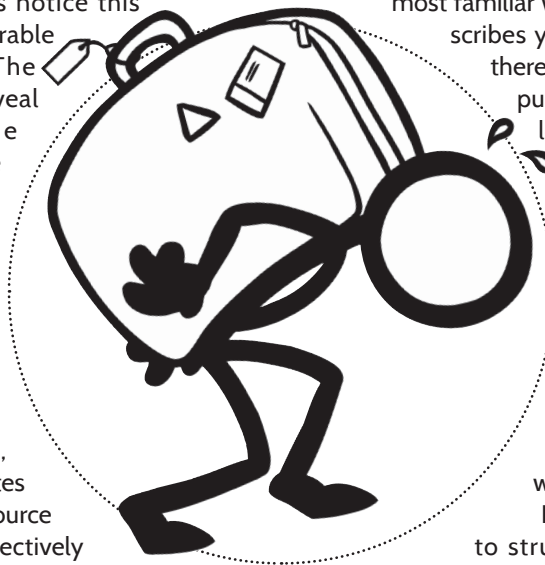
One physical attribute I frequently notice in people who suffer from severe scrupulosity is that they often look exhausted. Perhaps I'm sensitive to spotting exhaustion because I've ministered to many people with scrupulosity over the years. I'm sure others notice this trait. Exhaustion is measurable and difficult to mask. The observable symptoms reveal the inner truth of the struggle that's the source of the extreme fatigue the individual displays.

The root cause of the mental and physical exhaustion is the weight of the burden of the scrupulous condition. The perpetual struggle with whatever thought, desire, or intrusive action that ignites the fear and which is the source of the constant anxiety effectively denies a person his or her needed rest. The more dominant the thought, desire, or intrusive action, the more dominant the fear that often results in sleeplessness, restless sleep, and eventually exhaustion. If this describes your situation, ask

yourself: *Do I need to carry all this weight, or is there a way to lay the burden down?*

The good news is there's an effective way to reclaim some sense of peace and calm. There is also a way that's ineffective, and it's probably the way you're most familiar with. The ineffective way describes your present experience. But there *is* a way to manage the scrupulous condition. It's a skill that's learned, not something that happens out of the blue. It's practiced and engaged deliberately. The opposite also is true: Unmanaged scrupulosity that rules the roost is also something that's practiced and engaged deliberately, if not always with knowledge and never with full consent of the will. Let me explain.

It is counterproductive to struggle against the intrusive thought, desire, or action. The energy devoted to the struggle is used not to gain the hoped-for dominance and/or relief, but rather it's the root cause that fuels even more intrusive thoughts, desires, and actions. In fact, the more you struggle,



the more you enable what you most desire to find relief from. That may sound hard to believe, but it's true. Still, you need not remain at the mercy of wave after wave of relentless fear and anxiety. There's a way out.

The learned skill of management is the only way to enjoy any kind of peace of mind. Not perfect peace but a peace of mind that will make you feel less burdened and exhausted by life. It begins with identifying what needs to be carried and what doesn't. To answer that, you have to be brutally honest with yourself and learn the skill of letting go.

The first piece of baggage to drop is sin. This demands a reordering of your perception of who God is. Learn to resist the image of a vengeful "God" who's waiting to pounce on any error or weakness. A "God" who uses normal expressions of the human condition as an excuse to send you into eternal damnation does not exist. That "God" is a depiction of your fear, a self-generated and self-claimed fear. It feels real, but it's not. Let it go.

The second unnecessary piece of luggage you need to release is your "favorite" go-to thought, desire, or feeling that guarantees a scrupulous response. If you can't let it go, try to put it in a mental storage shed. Items in physical storage units still belong to you, but they don't dominate your everyday habits and experiences. Same with the mental shed.

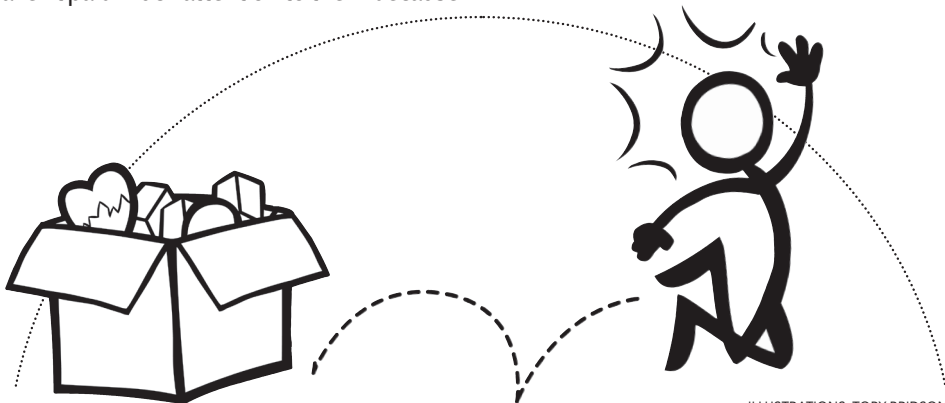
If you struggle with scrupulosity, you have a specific concentration and focus that expresses your condition and might dominate you. But, happily, there are entire swaths of your life that aren't tagged with scrupulosity. These areas are free of fear and anxiety. But you haven't paid much attention to them because

of your scrupulous focus. This focus is not the result of free will or sin. It's not a deliberate choice. It just is. Nothing more.

Just as you need to list what's in a real storage shed to keep track of what's in it, you need to make a couple of inventories of yourself. First, you need a fearless inventory of the thoughts, desires, and feelings that produce scrupulosity within you. At the same time, you need an inventory of thoughts, desires, and feelings that produce genuine happiness in your life. You may not be able to produce such an inventory on your own, and that's perfectly fine. A confessor, a spiritual director, a friend, or a family member who knows you well may see positive traits in you that you don't see in yourself.

Once you write the inventories, you must then choose again to put aside whatever generates scrupulosity for you. Every time you experience fear or anxiety that's rooted in one of your self-identified triggers of scrupulosity, remember to identify the feeling as manifested scrupulosity, not as sin. Correct identification of what's really going on within you is a sure path to freedom. It demands practice and the grace of fortitude, but it will lead to a deepening sense of peace and calm.

You need not carry baggage that isn't yours to lug around. That mental hauling has exhausted you. That stuff weighs you down. But! If you fearlessly identify what you need to put aside and then store it or get rid of it—and also affirm good things about yourself—you will experience greater freedom: the real experience of the peace and love that God wants for his people. ✨



The Critic Self-analyzed

Jane McViper is a methodical woman. For one thing, she likes to draw up lists. She was on hand for the usual bridge party at the home of one of the “girls,” where she decided the time had come to discuss the latest gaucheries of the abominable (but absent) Mabel Deerhardt. Jane ticked off one by one the lamentable failings of her victim. The girls enjoyed her presentation immensely. Jane was delighted to see tears of laughter flowing down the cheeks of some of them.

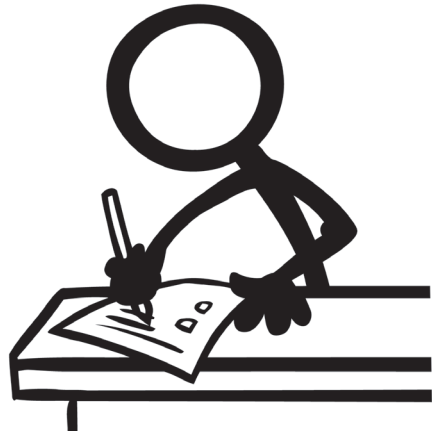
But as Jane was driving home, she began to feel disquieted about shredding Mabel’s reputation. So at home she sat down and wrote at the top of a sheet of paper the following heading: *Advantages and Disadvantages of Character Assassination*. After scribbling furiously for an hour, she read to herself what she had written.

Disadvantages:

1. I can make enemies by criticizing others.
2. Criticism of others is an unproductive waste of time.
3. I can get to the point where even my close friends won’t trust me. They could believe that when they’re not present, I’m doing the same kind of job on them.
4. Running down others can make me proud. Some people present today may conclude that I criticize others because I have a very high opinion of myself. Therefore:
5. I might have made a fool of myself.
6. I’m making it harder for myself to love others. The next time I see Mabel, it’s going to be almost impossible for me to be nice to her. In fact, I’ve probably made it difficult for our whole group to be nice to Mabel.
7. If I don’t soon begin to say something pleasant about others, I can get to the point where I’ll be incapable of seeing any good in anybody.
8. I have committed a sin, and if I want to be forgiven, I’ve somehow got to take back what I’ve said about Mabel.

Advantages:

1. Criticizing others makes me feel good all over.
2. I get a wonderful feeling of superiority out of criticizing.
3. The biggest advantage when you run someone down is that you run yourself up.



She then read her two lists again, slowly and thoughtfully. She put a big question mark after advantage #1. “I don’t really feel good all over,” she muttered.

She then crossed out entirely advantage #2. “How silly can you get!” she said.

She looked at advantage #3 for a long time and then put a question mark after it. “It’s at least debatable. After all, even I don’t think highly of character assassins.”

Then, she wrote the following on a third piece of paper: Resolution designed: 1) to make Jane McViper a more lovable, humble, useful, and considerate person, 2) to prevent her from spiritual disaster: **STOP BEING CRITICAL OF OTHERS!** ✨

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Q. *My nineteen-year-old son quit therapy with his OCD counselor because he was uncomfortable that the therapist wasn't Catholic. When he was asked to move up the ladder and face the higher challenges of ERP [exposure and response prevention], he didn't because he felt it was blasphemy. So my question is, do you ever counsel people with scrupulosity via Skype? I think we could really use your help.*

A. As painful as it might be to hear this, the uncomfortable truth is that your son will not be persuaded by me any more than he would by a professional. His excuse not to progress in his therapy because it is "blasphemy"—and it is an excuse—is a manifestation of his obsessive-compulsive disorder/scrupulosity. It's quite common. It indicates that the therapist was on the right track and making progress. I encourage him to return to the therapist who was making him uncomfortable. Your son might be on the verge of real progress and management, if not healing.

Q. *Are we required to make and keep New Year's promises? It seems to me such a waste of time and effort, and—more than anything else—it triggers a great source of anxiety.*

A. No, you're not required to do so. In fact, for a scrupulous person the making of any kind of promise is fraught with difficulty and is seldom, if ever, helpful. Leave the making of promises to others. Put your energy into the management of your condition. That's a much better use of your time and energy. ✨



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