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A Compelling Reason

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa

It's pretty much accepted that people don't change their behaviors, perceptions, ideas, and actions unless they have a compelling reason. Prodding from others and considering change on your own are part of the process, but only a compelling reason that provides real emotion and physical energy produces true change.

Some people think indisputable evidence that a behavior is harmful provides a compelling reason for change. But many people who understand the dangers of tobacco continue to use it. People who understand that their uncontrolled temper is harming their relationships continue to rant and throw tantrums. People who understand that they're at high risk of diabetes don't change their eating or exercise habits. Facts alone don't compel change.

Three people recently shared the following stories of change that beautifully illustrate this point. I've changed their names to protect their privacy.

When Mike realized he no longer had the time, energy, and inner resources to maintain his scrupulosity, he thought he'd just have to live with the fear and anxiety he always experienced when he wasn't vigilant. But to his amazement, when the

first wave of fear and anxiety subsided, he was OK. It was quite unpleasant for a while, but he survived. Now he understands that fear and anxiety cannot conquer him.

For Mike, the compelling reason to change was sheer exhaustion.



Alice struggled with holy Communion, physically retreating from the sacrament by sitting farther and farther back—until she reached the last pew and realized her next move would take her out the door. That was unacceptable, so she chose to move up to the first pew. For weeks, that was all she was able to accomplish. She was very uncomfortable, but she did it.

Then one day she got up and was first in line to receive Communion. She was back in her pew before she knew it, and it was exhilarating.

For Alice, the compelling reason to change was her desire to stay in the church.



A years-long fear of throwing away objects that might be blessed or holy, no matter how remote the

possibility, meant that Sarah never threw anything away. Slowly but surely her home filled up. Her family gave up trying to get her to change. Her relationships deteriorated, and she became more and more isolated.

One day, simply by chance, she stumbled on a television program about hoarders and realized that what she was seeing on the screen was also happening in her home. It hit her like a lightning bolt. It was a wake-up call for change, and with professional help she reclaimed her life and a healthy living space.

Is she still afraid she'll dispose of something holy? Yes, the fear remains, but now she has help to deal with it. She's chosen not to let the fear dominate her life.

For Sarah, the compelling reason to change was that she could no longer move around in her home.

Many readers of this newsletter will identify with these stories. Thousands of other people have equally compelling stories. The details are different, but they share one theme: Each person discovered not a rational reason for change, not a factual reason for change, but rather a compelling reason for change. Changing wasn't easy, smooth, or uncomplicated, but it happened because there was no other choice.

Not once in these stories did I refer to sin, or not following God's will, or anything else that usually concerns people with scrupulosity. In each of these stories, change occurred as a result of the outpouring of the grace of God.

The real challenge of faith is not to search for a compelling reason to change or to beat ourselves up for not feeling so compelled. The challenge is to pray for the grace to accept the opportunity to respond with courage when grace is offered to us.

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Reflection

The following is adapted from [You Are the Catholic Brand](#) by Matthew Kilmurry (Liguori Publications, © 2016. All rights reserved.)

Over the last hundred years, companies have learned the benefits of creating a brand, something Catholics have known for 2,000 years. One of the most important aspects of creating a brand is developing a mission statement—a concise statement of the company’s beliefs and how it will accomplish its mission. Sound familiar? It should. That’s what Catholics do every time we recite the Nicene Creed.

And just as companies need employees to buy in to the brand in their daily work lives, so does the Catholic Church. If the employees don’t buy in to the brand, it falls flat.

But be encouraged: Unlike employees in a company who get just one day of brand training, Catholics get a lifetime of brand training. In addition, we have a helper, the Holy Spirit, who gives us the strength, knowledge, and power to be who God intended us to be. All we have to do is be willing. If only all jobs came with powerful help like that.



Forgiveness is spiritual balm. If we hold on to resentments, we lead a life of anger, hatred, and retaliation. This results in endless emotional pain and bitterness that prevent us from

living as God has planned. When we forgive, we’re healed from the inside out, and our personal Catholic brand shines bright with the love of God for all to see. The healing of my marriage began when Shannon forgave me. If she hadn’t, we would have been stuck within the ice-cold confines of anger and shame.

We must also forgive ourselves. Often the person I hold the most resentment toward is myself. I feel shame and guilt over my sins. Like St. Paul, who called himself the foremost of sinners, I need to admit I’m a sinner first. Once I acknowledge my sins, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation, it opens me to the grace of forgiveness from God. If simple human forgiveness heals the spirit, imagine the effect of heavenly forgiveness.

Sometimes I find myself taking out the worn-out bat of shame and guilt, beating myself up over past sins. No one is harsher to me than me. I must remember that God came to earth as a man to pay the price for my sins.

If I’m truly repentant and seek forgiveness through reconciliation, who am I to hold resentments against myself when God has already forgiven me?



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Q *Scrupulosity and obsessive-compulsive disorder are simply the sin of vain-glory. The spiritual classics are filled with examples that illustrate the truth of this assertion.*

A I strongly disagree. What makes vain-glory seem the same as OCD and scrupulosity is the frantic search for an explanation of OCD/scrupulosity as something other than a disorder, and by extension something for which the person is ultimately responsible. This desperate search is in fact a manifestation of the disorder, not an explanation for the experience.

Q *The Holy Spirit has abandoned me because I sinned. My life is falling apart. I'm divorced, and my daughter is unhappy because her classmates think she's weird. I think we both have scrupulosity.*

A The Holy Spirit hasn't abandoned you. It's impossible for the Spirit of God to abandon us. This is not an issue of scrupulosity. You and your daughter are experiencing trauma. You both need professional guidance and support to deal with it.

You cannot pray this kind of trauma away. You need to use the gifts God has blessed you with. These gifts include professional psychological guidance.

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