



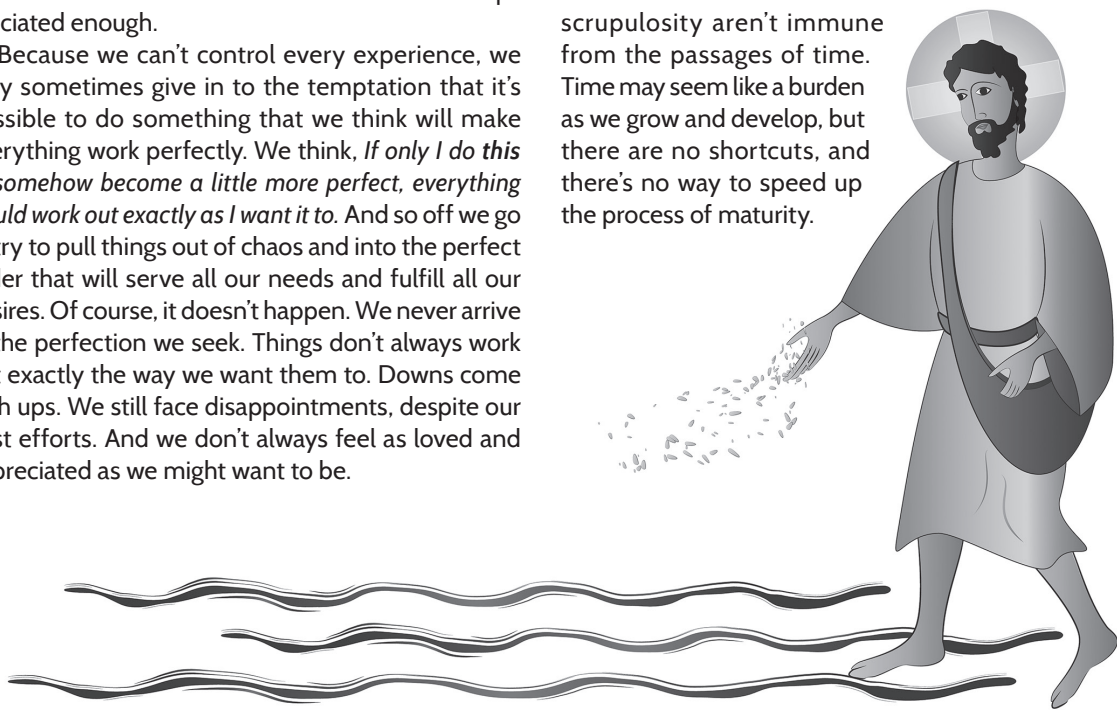
## *Imperfect Perfection*

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**B**eing a human being is difficult. Life just doesn't unfold the way we expect or imagine. There are all sorts of ups and downs. It seems that as many times as we are pleased and surprised, we also are unhappy and disappointed. Although many of our needs are met, not all of them are. Even though we may well be fed and nourished, we often want more. Even though we may well be loved and appreciated, we sometimes conclude that we are not loved or appreciated enough.

Because we can't control every experience, we may sometimes give in to the temptation that it's possible to do something that we think will make everything work perfectly. We think, *If only I do this or somehow become a little more perfect, everything would work out exactly as I want it to.* And so off we go to try to pull things out of chaos and into the perfect order that will serve all our needs and fulfill all our desires. Of course, it doesn't happen. We never arrive at the perfection we seek. Things don't always work out exactly the way we want them to. Downs come with ups. We still face disappointments, despite our best efforts. And we don't always feel as loved and appreciated as we might want to be.

At some point on our individual journeys to adulthood and maturity, people realize the truth of what it means to be human. Even better, most people eventually arrive at a point of peace and contentment, a point of acceptance and serenity, but the journey is more of a struggle for some people. It's important for us to realize this and come to peace with our own timing and our own experiences. The men and women who suffer with scrupulosity aren't immune from the passages of time. Time may seem like a burden as we grow and develop, but there are no shortcuts, and there's no way to speed up the process of maturity.



***According to Jesus, the person looking for the kingdom of God, the one who's waiting to experience the fullness of the presence of God in life, needs some essential skills. Perfection isn't on the list.***



There is no such thing as a perfect or an imperfect human being. We're all capable of doing well and not so well. Everyone has moments of happiness and times of sadness. What's essential is to recognize the human condition and then permit the Spirit of the Lord to work creatively within us, molding us and forming us according to the pattern of grace.

If you want to learn this lesson, listen carefully to the parables of Jesus. When we hear parables or when we meditate on them in our reading of the Scripture, we're introduced to people who are quite familiar to us. The main characters of the parables are not perfect people. The parables of Jesus don't speak to us about people who have their entire act together. Rather, parables are stories about ordinary people like you and me. However, there's often one thing that makes each of the people in the parables stand out. The characters in the parables have enough sense, as a result of the lesson that is shared, to understand that they are offered a particular grace or given another chance, or many other outcomes. In each parable, once the characters realize they've found the treasure, nothing can get in their way.

Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God is "like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, it's like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it" (Matthew 13:44-46). Each story zeroes in on the same point: A valuable object is out there somewhere. A person who is looking for it discovers it, and then that individual sacrifices everything to possess it.

According to Jesus, the person looking for the kingdom of God, the one who's waiting to experience the fullness of the presence of God in life, needs some essential skills. Perfection isn't on the list. Rather, only

those who develop a searching mind and are willing to give up everything for a treasure no one else even notices can be people of the kingdom. In other words, the followers of the Lord live in the same world everyone else inhabits, but they live differently from everyone else.

The teachings of Jesus, particularly in the parables, are a little more challenging for each of us than we might first imagine. Perhaps listening to and praying about the Gospel parables might help us understand that, despite our strengths and weaknesses, despite our perceptions about ourselves and our perceptions about what is good and bad, perfect and imperfect, that which is really necessary is probably not what we might be spending all of our time and energy concerned about. Perhaps what we need to develop is a searching mind and open spirit that will permit us to seize the Lord's invitation to the kingdom, despite any imperfections we may see in ourselves. When that invitation comes, we must be willing to jettison everything we think is important and go for the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price.

I'm often comforted by the fact that, as a child of God, I daily experience imperfect perfection. I'm constantly being formed in the perfect likeness of God, even when I don't always recognize the grace of God at work in my imperfect life.

Thankfully, growing in the pattern of grace is a process that continues daily, not through my efforts but through the life and blessing that God gives me each day. As long as I try to remain aware of the grace of God in my life and welcome the manifestation of God in my life, I'm on the right path. When I try to take over or set the direction for the journey instead of depending on the Spirit of God, I experience a feeling of loss. As Scripture teaches and invites us to embrace, "With God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). ✨

# From Fear to Faith

**A**ll that stands between anxiety and peace is you! Your actions can and will make the difference. Plus, Jesus is with you and is waiting for you to grow closer to him on a personal level. And, Mary is also with you and wants to get to know you better. She wants to help the relationship between Jesus and you grow deeper. You have the faith (even if it's weak) that will allow you to start trusting more. All that's missing is some behavior modification on your part. To complete the journey, you just have to change some of the negative habits that are dragging you down.

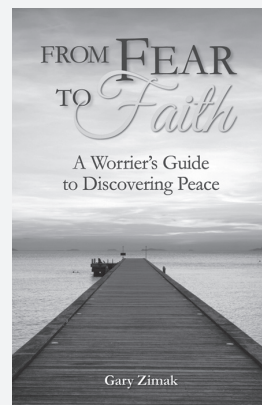
I've come up with five steps—the Five P's of Peace—that will enable you to complete the journey from fear to faith. When put into practice, the Five P's will truly bring you PEACE!

1. **Prepare:** Do what you can to solve your problem.
2. **Present:** Focus on the present; don't worry about the future.
3. **Pray:** Speak to the Lord each day.
4. **Participate:** Take advantage of the Church's gifts, including the Bible, the sacraments, and Eucharistic Adoration.
5. **Prize:** Keep your eye on the prize...focus on heaven!

I also am a weak person, and there is no way I could break free from anxiety on my own. I need lots of help and simple, easy-to-follow steps. That's what this approach provides. Whenever I begin to feel I'm too weak to overcome my anxiety, I turn to the words of someone else who thought he was weak:

"...I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (see 2 Corinthians 12:10).

Saint Paul concluded it's OK to have weaknesses. Everyone is weak in some way. The beautiful thing about letting the Lord help us overcome anxiety is that he does most of the work. While we are still expected to do what we can, Jesus will take our efforts and multiply them greatly. The problem with many secular "overcoming anxiety" methods is that they don't include God in the mix. If I live in fear and worry about everything, there's a good chance I'm not strong enough to follow the steps needed to break free from anxiety. That's why we need the help of Jesus and the Blessed Mother. If you need some additional encouragement, recall the words the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary: "Nothing will be impossible for God" (Luke 1:37). ✨



Excerpted from *From Fear to Faith, a Worrier's Guide to Discovering Peace* by Gary Zimak.

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# Mailbox

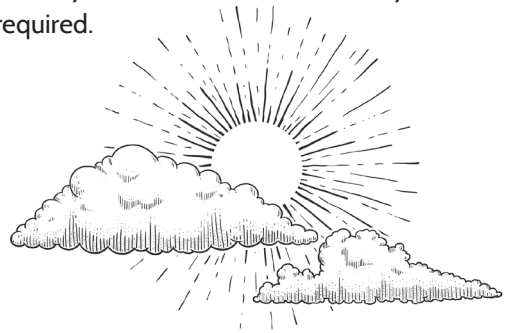
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**Q.** *A friend of mine got divorced and remarried. When we attend Mass together, she walks up the aisle with me and receives Communion. I am uncomfortable with her receiving Communion because I know she should not. What is my responsibility in this matter? Should I gently try and explain the teaching of the Church to her or perhaps be more forceful and help her understand what she is doing?*

**A.** You should do nothing, and you have no responsibility to do so. You don't know the state of her conscience and you don't know the details of her relationship with the Church (which may well include an annulment that she chooses not to talk to you about). You have only your perceptions and your judgments made without all the facts. The consistent pastoral teaching of the SA directors in matters of conscience for a scrupulous person is to presume not the worst but the best for the people in their life and their relationship with God. That's good advice.

**Q.** *I know you answered a similar question before, but this is a little different. I plan to choose between one of two cruises. The more expensive cruise has a clearly defined Sunday Mass opportunity; the cheaper cruise doesn't seem to have a Sunday Mass guarantee. The only real difference in the cruises is the price. Am I obliged under mortal sin to choose the more expensive cruise?*

**A.** No. You have no obligation to choose the more expensive cruise. You seem to be inclined to choose the cheaper cruise to save money, not to avoid Sunday Mass. You're obligated to go to Sunday Mass when you have the ability, using ordinary human effort. Extraordinary effort is never required.



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