



Healing From Self-Sabotage

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Unfortunately, one of the most common experiences is self-sabotage. That might seem strange to assert, but it's true. Self-sabotage often happens when we resolve to change a particular behavior. As soon as we decide to change, we often subconsciously or deliberately choose actions that get in the way of the change we seek.

For example, we decide to decrease our sugar consumption while ensuring we have plenty of sweets on hand for guests. Before long, we're enjoying a cookie or a piece of candy that had been intended for guests. If the sweets had been out of reach, our resolution might have remained intact.

Another example: We decide to exercise regularly. We buy the right equipment or join a health club. At first we enthusiastically work out but soon start doing

things instead of our daily exercise routine. Soon we begin to think, "*What's the use?*" and give up exercising, an activity that's really good for us.

In both examples, our *intentions* for positive change were good but our *commitment* wasn't strong enough. More often than not we choose to change only because someone said "it would be good for you" or because we were *mildly* unsatisfied with some sort of behavior. Other examples might be a spiritual desire to do something meaningful for Lent or to sharpen our spiritual practices and disciplines. Each are wonderful reasons to change but each may set you up for self-sabotage. In addition, self-sabotage also rears up even when the change we want to make is required and/or essential for our well-being and overall health.

We might assume that when the need is obvious and the risk is real we would focus as much attention and energy that's required to make the change. That usually doesn't happen. Even when the need is urgent or the situation is unhealthy, we're still prone to self-sabotage, although we may not easily recognize the dynamic.

For people who suffer with scrupulosity and desire to engage in a healthy path toward the management of their pathology, self-sabotage of even their best effort comes quickly into play. There are the obvious challenges that are experienced as a result of the managed therapy that's applied, such as a rise in anxiety or impatience with the progress of the effort. This is expected and perfectly normal as part of the process. The point where real and permanent change might begin to occur is also the point where a particular form of self-sabotage often manifests.

At the point where the management of the obsessive and compulsive behavior comes into focus, the following seemingly random but also destructive thought often appears. It's along this line: *"My scrupulosity is God's will for me, and if I learn to manage it I am not accepting God's will."* Other common destructive thoughts sound like: *"My therapist is telling me to sin,"* or *"my therapist is not a good Catholic/Christian and doesn't really understand what is going on."* These are just a few common random and destructive thoughts, all of which have the same result. They effectively derail the healing process and the progress toward an effective management of the compulsive behavior.

What's occurring is not so much fear, anxiety, or a perceived spiritual shortcoming. The thoughts are pathetic defensive attempts by the scrupulous condition itself to reassert authority and pathology. The real danger is not that of sin or disobedience to the will of God but rather the possibility of an effective management skill that leads to a healthier human being and experience of life.

In a strange way that I don't completely understand and yet have learned to appreciate, the anxious questions that attempt to derail or detour the process of healing are positive signals that the applied therapy is beginning to work! What's needed is the courage that's fueled by the gift of God's manifested grace, to turn head-long into the fear and anxiety and determine not to give in to self-sabotage.

It takes real courage to stand in the breach of anxiety and fear, but it's necessary to do so in order to attain the peace that's desired. There are no shortcuts to healing, which is sometimes quite painful. That's the unavoidable reality. For some people, having a spiritual director or confessor they trust is quite helpful when they engage in the behavioral therapy that will help them manage their scrupulous condition.

Walking a path toward healing, even if the healing is necessary for health and personal growth, feels risky because it will produce uncomfortable and intense feelings that need to be identified and acknowledged. It's often helpful to have a companion who will journey

with you and encourage you when you're tempted to self-sabotage or when you throw your hands up in despair and are tempted to end the struggle. Asking someone to journey with you toward healing is also a very powerful way to resist the temptation toward isolation, which is one of the most unhelpful temptations that can be engaged when healing is required.

Few people are so strong or confident that they are able to engage a perilous journey without the support and caring of another person, a companion who supports and encourages them. The journey toward a managed way of living with scrupulosity is one such perilous journey. Reach out, and with God's grace, claim the help and encouragement you need. You *can* choose to significantly reduce the possibility of self-sabotage. I pray that you do. ✨

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Invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Time of Temptation

St. Alphonsus Liguori (Memorial: August 1)

Alphonsus painted many portraits of Mary, the woman he referred to as “Mamma Maria,” including one when he was bishop of St. Agatha. He was so caught up in his effort that he couldn’t stop gazing at it, saying, “She is so beautiful, so beautiful.” Pope Francis was once asked what Mary meant to him. His answer? She is my “mamma.” The invocation in the following poem by St. Alphonsus is addressed familiarly to Mary as “Mamma Mia.”

Run, Run, Mamma Mia

Curri, Curri, Mamma Mia (written in Neapolitan dialect)

Run, run, Mamma mia;
run quickly, do not delay!
see, the serpent, (may it not be so),
comes my trembling soul to slay.

Alas, the mere sight of him
makes me tremble so;
Mamma, Mamma, see my fear,
as with might he draws near!

Lo, I’m helpless and faint away
and don’t know what to do;
now he darts at me his venom;
Mamma mia, come quickly, come.

Cries and tears have not availed,
in spite of all, he’s there to stay.
I am tired of calling on the saints,
he pays no heed and won’t stay still.

O, what a mouth he now has opened!
O, dear Mary, he’ll swallow me,
he is coiled, ready to strike
O dear Mary, make him flee!

I see that hearing of your name,
fills with dread my cruel foe;
so, to add to his dismay,
Mamma, come with me to stay.

See him fleeing! What has happened?
Who is chasing him away?
Serpent, cruel and angry,
may you never return this way!



Excerpted from *O God of Loveliness: The Poetry of St. Alphonsus*, edited by Patrick Corbett, CSsR (Liguori product code 963988). To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

Mailbox

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Q. *My senior class trip is a long weekend to Walt Disney World in Florida. We're required to stay the entire time in the Disney World village, and I'm not sure if Sunday Mass will be an option. If I miss Sunday Mass as a result of this situation, is it a mortal sin or a venial sin?*

A. How about no sin at all? If you're unable to attend Sunday Mass for a good reason—and the safety and security of the senior class far away from home is an example of a good reason—there is no sin. The obligation for Sunday Mass doesn't require superhuman effort, and it doesn't require you not to go on the trip. Enjoy your senior trip, and if the opportunity for Sunday Mass is present, attend Mass as part of your experience for yet another good memory.

Q. *Where do you come up with this stuff? If you're not going to be a faithful witness of the teaching of the Magisterium and of the Catholic Church, then at least don't burden all of us with even more confusion. I want faithfulness, not another priest who is lukewarm if not unbelieving in his faith.*

A. I know you won't like my answer. The issue is not me, the issue is you and, even more to the point, the issue is your anger. In addition to your anger, the other issue is the severe measure you use as a moral compass. This is not required, is not representative of orthodoxy, and is most certainly not an expression of "good pastoral care and direction," which is the purpose of this ministry. You need help, and attacking me is just a distraction. Please seek the help you need. There is no life in the unnecessary prison of anger and severity.



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