



Essential Management Rules

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

In order to successfully manage the scrupulous disorder, some essential rules need to be implemented. Ideally these rules will be applied to the disorder in a partnership of healing. The partner may be the person's regular confessor, spiritual director, or a trusted person with whom the scrupulous person is in a relationship. These are examples of the people who are most necessary if the management of the disorder is to have the best chance of success.

If no close, spiritual partnership is possible, people with the scrupulous disorder can still apply the rules. But please remember that working in concert with a spiritual guide is optimal in advancing healing.

It is best to apply the essential rules in concert with a trusted person.

In addition—and as always—the primary animating and energizing source of the healing power that these rules depend on is the grace of the Spirit of God. Grace is the healing power, the resource that must be claimed in order to engage in the management of the disorder. Scrupulosity is primarily a psychological disorder, but it does have a spiritual component. If you have the disorder and ignore either psychology or spirituality, you will make an error that will most certainly complicate your healing journey and may doom it to failure.

THE ESSENTIAL RULES

1. Clearly understand and accept that scrupulosity (not “tender conscience”) is a disorder. It is not a personal cross to bear. It was not given to you by God to test your resolve or deepen your spiritual life. You did nothing to engage the disorder and you are not responsible for it.
2. Resist shortcuts, false promises of healing, or any kind of explanation that does not accept and acknowledge that scrupulosity is a disorder. You may find it comforting to believe it is something else, but such a belief is a fundamental error.
3. Seek professional and spiritual help, and accept that the only way to effective scrupulosity management is through the integration of proper psychological intervention, the application of an effective prescription medicine, and focused spiritual direction. This is the path to wholeness and holiness. There are no shortcuts.
4. Traditional orthodox Catholic moral teaching accepts scrupulosity as a disorder that limits/diminishes your capacity (ability) to make the essential free choices that are required for full consent of the will. As a result of diminished capacity, your default position is

to falsely assume the presence of mortal sin in all things. This untrue belief means you have no free choice because you experience only one choice, one that is false. The supposed presence of mortal sin in all things is the fundamental error and source of suffering for the scrupulous person.

5. Resist the temptation to accumulate content in the false belief that you can discover the one answer you seek. Content is not your friend. Many voices, opinions, teachings, and resources serve no purpose but to confuse you and energize the disorder. No catechism statement or canon law is the key to clarity.

6. Resist the compulsion to constantly seek reassurance. Feel the feelings. Sit with the discomfort. When you experience yourself filled with an avalanche of feelings, questions, and anxiety, this is the guaranteed presence of scrupulosity. Doing nothing is much better than doing something in response to discomfort. Focus on the present moment.

7. The normal spiritual disciplines and practices that are encouraged as the way to holiness for a person who does not have scrupulosity do not help you and must not be engaged. This includes the examination of conscience, repetitive prayers, and any spiritual practice that must be performed on a certain day or at a certain time.

8. Reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis is not possible. The sacrament should be celebrated only with the direction of your spiritual director/confessor and must include the necessary help and preparation of your director. Reconciliation must ordinarily be experienced through the Eucharist, the Anointing of the Sick, or an act of contrition. (A healthy understanding of rule 4 will help you understand the truth of rule 8.)

9. Reception of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist must never be denied. You must receive the sacrament each time you celebrate the

Eucharist. You cannot deny yourself this sacred and important encounter with Jesus, your Most Holy Redeemer.

10. Scrupulosity cannot exist in the present moment. It thrives in the experience of the past, recalling either the real, imagined, and always incomplete experience of sin, or in the future, living in fear of an imagined judgment of damnation. A disciplined practice of mindfulness, contemplative breathing, and centering prayer, are among the effective practices that help a person focus on the present moment, the Eternal Now.

11. Be patient and compassionate with the application of these rules to your spiritual journey. If you have not been as successful as you might hope in the implementation of these rules, do not be concerned. It is just a minor detour. Simply start again.

There are people, including priests, who do not understand the disorder or the havoc it creates.

Each of these management rules have been discerned as the result of years of pastoral ministry and experience. Each rule reflects the lived experience of men and women who suffer with the scrupulous condition and who have learned management skills.

In practiced and focused spiritual direction, I have listened to people share with me how these rules have slowly changed their lives and helped them achieve a sense of peace. They are effective rules for managing scrupulous conditions and are intended only for those who suffer with the disorder. They have been pastorally fine-tuned expressly for this purpose and may be unfamiliar to confessors, priests, and others who are inexperienced with the disorder. That only means there are people, including priests, who do not understand the disorder or the havoc it creates. ⚙

Coping When Your Spouse Dies

"I wish I had been a better wife/husband."

Going back over the marriage in your mind can cause you deep feelings of guilt, even in the best of marriages. The list of "SHOULD HAVES" can be lengthy. You may think I SHOULD HAVE:

- ...been more affectionate.
- ...kept my mouth shut more often.
- ...remembered anniversaries and special days with cards and flowers.
- ...not been so wrapped up in work or the kids.
- ...made a point of doing more together.
- ...traveled more.
- ...not teased or been so critical.
- ...been more patient and not so angry or hostile at times.
- ...been more loving and not so quiet or withdrawn.

The unfair part of being the survivor is you are the one left behind to handle all the affairs, deal with all the problems, and shoulder all the guilt. You carry the entire load of the rights and especially the wrongs. You both did things that were wrong in the marriage, but there is only you left to worry, fret, and feel guilt.

REALISTIC GUILT

You are responsible for your words and deeds—abusiveness, drinking bouts, coldness, cheating, profanity, and so on. There are no excuses. There is no pretending otherwise. You feel guilty about what you did or said. Unless resolved or forgiven, this guilt can be present and gnaw away at you for years like a spiritual cancer. Admit to yourself that you are human and weak, that you make mistakes and that you, too, are a sinner. Through prayers and with tears, ask forgiveness of your departed spouse. The inner peace that you experience will be the sign of forgiveness. Ask forgiveness from your children and others. A tremendous inner healing will result. Finally, seek forgiveness

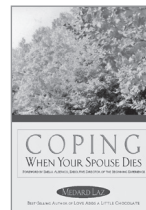
from God. The Sacrament of Reconciliation also gives the assurance of God's acceptance of you, your love, and your sincere sorrow.

UNREALISTIC GUILT

Remember that your late spouse was an adult. He or she also had to be responsible, and many events that happened were beyond the control of both of you. Most of us tend to be hard on ourselves, to heap blame and guilt on ourselves for everything that goes wrong in a given situation. Few of us recognize that if we fail to be all we can be at home, or we do not show or tell others that they are loved today we may not have the opportunity to do so tomorrow. And when one of those others is our departed spouse, we drown in a sea of guilt.

Unrealistic guilt should be banished from your life. Yet you continue to blame yourself for past events—even though you were not responsible for them. *"If only I had been there when my spouse died."* It is impossible to always be with someone. If you were not there for whatever reason, that is not a clear cause for guilt. That is why the guilt you are shouldering is unrealistic.

List all the "SHOULD HAVES" as you review your marriage. Label each as realistic or unrealistic guilt. What guilts are you particularly harboring? What do you find most difficult about forgiving yourself? How have you been hard on yourself throughout your grieving of your deceased spouse? ⚙



Excerpted from *Coping When Your Spouse Dies*, © 1998 Medard Laz (Liguori Publications 802263).

To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.



ONE LIGUORI DRIVE, LIGUORI, MO 63057 • NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q. Are all sexual thoughts, feelings, and desires sinful? I am very confused with what I read about sexual sin. It seems to me that everything is sinful.

A. Sexual thoughts, feelings, and desires are an essential experience of being human. You were created by God to be sexual. In and of themselves, all sexual experiences are layered with meaning. When isolated and held to a single definition of meaning, that is where confusion is guaranteed. Context, integration, boundaries, and mutual respect are always necessary.

Q. The song says, "How can I be sure, in a world that's constantly changing?" That pretty much sums up my dilemma. How can I be sure?

A. Those lyrics hit the nail right on the head. You cannot be sure. Doubt is an essential part of the lived experience of being human. The best that can be hoped for is a discerned and honest choice whenever possible. Mistakes will always happen, even when they are not intended.



A Free Gift for You

To show our appreciation to *Scrupulous Anonymous* readers for your generosity and support, we are offering you a FREE, no-strings-attached one-year subscription to the digital edition of *Liguorian* magazine. All you need to do is email your own email address to Liguori@liguori.org and type "Scrupulous Anonymous Free Gift" in the email text area. You may also call 800-325-9521 and reserve your gift.

The *Liguorian* digital edition will be delivered to you via email six-times per year for one year, starting with the January-February 2024 edition. The deadline to take advantage of this free subscription is December 15, 2023. ⚙️

To manage your *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter subscription, please call 800-325-9521 or email Liguori@liguori.org.



Please help us continue *Scrupulous Anonymous* and other *Liguori Publications* ministries by making a tax-deductible donation or remembering us in your will. Our legal title is

Redemptorist Fathers dba *Liguori Publications*, Federal ID 43-0653409. To donate by credit card, please go to ScrupulousAnonymous.org and click on "Support the Ministry." To donate by check, please use the enclosed envelope or mail to *Liguori Publications*, One *Liguori Drive*, *Liguori, MO 63057*.

© 2023 *Liguori Publications*. All rights reserved. **Policy on copying or distributing:** **Individuals** may download, print, copy, and/or share issues of *Scrupulous Anonymous* provided 1) you don't remove this copying/distributing policy and 2) you don't seek or accept payment for the copies. **Nonprofit organizations** may quote SA in publications offered at no cost as long as you identify *Scrupulous Anonymous* as the source and include the issue number or date and the publisher (*Liguori Publications*, *ScrupulousAnonymous.org*). **For commercial or other purposes**, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of *Liguori Publications*. *Liguori Publications*, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the *Redemptorists* (Redemptorists.com).