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FROM FEAR TO *Faith*

A Worrier's Guide
to Discovering Peace

Gary Zimak

What People Are Saying About *From Fear to Faith*

Scripture tells us “the beginning of wisdom is fear of the LORD.” But what kind of fear and how much fear is too much when it comes to our relationship with God and our efforts to live as Catholic Christians? Drawing from his own personal struggles, Gary Zimak combines experience with solid Church teaching and God’s word to address these important questions and more in his book. Given the many challenges facing believers today, this book is a must-have for those who are serious about becoming the people the Lord wants them to be.

Teresa Tomeo (teresatomeo.com), motivational speaker,
best-selling author, syndicated Catholic talk-show host

Jesus said fear is useless, and what is needed is trust. Yet how do we move from ordinary life in our age of anxiety to that trusting life of faith? Gary Zimak shows the way in steps even I can follow. You’ll come to treasure this book, but don’t just keep it to yourself. Buy copies for your friends and family members who need it.

Mike Aquilina, EWTN television host and author or editor
of more than forty books on Catholic history, doctrine,
and devotion

You'll laugh, you'll experience relief, and your faith will become fortified. *From Fear to Faith: A Worrier's Guide to Discovering Peace* is a unique book guaranteed to put you at ease. Through a heartfelt, conversational approach, Gary Zimak underscores the necessity of encountering Jesus to fully experience the joy of the Gospel. Zimak offers solid, no-nonsense proof of why worrying is detrimental to the health of body and soul and provides a doable step-by-step plan to overcome worry and fear. Practical reminders and reflection points complete each chapter. Great for laity, priests, religious, and ministries—highly recommended!

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle (donnacooperoboyle.com),
EWTN television host, speaker, and author of *The Miraculous Medal: Stories, Prayers, and Devotions*, and *Catholic Mom's Cafe: 5-Minute Retreats for Every Day of the Year*

Gary Zimak has created a masterpiece. This book is a sincere, energetic, and practical source of encouragement to all of us who have ever struggled with self-doubt or fear. It's an indispensable resource for the journey of our lives. Read it and allow yourself to be transformed. The peace of the Lord awaits!

Kevin Lowry, chief operating officer of Coming Home Network International and author of *Faith at Work: Finding Purpose Beyond the Paycheck*

One of my favorite passages in the New Testament is when Jesus tells his apostles: “In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (John 16:33). There is no doubt, as Jesus affirms, that we live in a troubled world that could give us much to worry about. Yet our faith in the promises of Christ gives us the ability to overcome our fears and anxieties. In *From Fear to Faith*, Gary Zimak gives both practical advice and biblical examples to help us have total confidence and trust in the goodness of our loving God. I highly recommend this book to all!

Donald Calloway, MIC, author of *Marian Gems*:

Daily Wisdom on Our Lady and other books

From Fear to Faith is an insightful and challenging look at how fear keeps us “running in place,” afraid to take that next step toward greatness. The reader will discover how worry and fear produce lukewarm Catholics, rather than spirit-filled proclaimers of the Gospel. With vivid clarity, honesty and thoughtfulness, Gary Zimak draws from sacred Scripture, practical wisdom, endearing personal stories, and timeless devotions to show how unwavering trust in God’s love casts out all fear, heals wounds of sin and division, and opens our hearts to God’s will in our lives. This book is a must-read for anyone who is stuck in the abyss of fear and yearns to ascend toward the summit of enduring peace.

Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, EWTN series host, author,
and director of dynamicdeacon.com

In conversational style, Gary masterfully weaves his personal experience of anxiety and fear with the gifts of the Catholic Church to forge a path to healing. He shows us how to, as he says, “let Jesus do most of the work.” Whether you suffer with anxiety or fear, are a health-care provider or a priest or religious seeking resources, this book is for you!

Staci Gulino, MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC, psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner, host of *Faith & Good Counsel* and *Wake Up Louisiana* on Catholic Community Radio

FROM FEAR TO *Faith*

A Worrier's Guide
to Discovering Peace

Gary Zimak

Imprimi Potest:

Harry Grile, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

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

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Zimak, Gary.

From fear to faith : a worrier's guide to discovering peace / Gary E. Zimak.—First Edition.
pages cm

1. Fear—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Worry—Religious aspects—Christianity.

3. Peace—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Catholic Church—Doctrines. I. Title.

BV4908.5.Z56 2014

248.4—dc23

2014018796

p ISBN 978-0-7648-2492-0

e ISBN 978-0-7648-6938-9

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Excerpts from English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*; English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of The Redemptorists. To learn more about The Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 / 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

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Introduction

*“Why are you terrified?
Do you not yet have faith?”*

MARK 4:40

Jesus’ questions, directed to his disciples in midst of a storm at sea, could easily be directed to each of us whenever we are worried. Considering that it comes from the lips of Christ, these questions could understandably prove frightening or even depressing. In reality, however, it’s a good idea to think about these words in a positive way. After all, if our faith is lacking, we should be aware of it so we can take steps to correct the problem.

Like many of you, I am traveling the road that leads from fear to faith. I definitely know what it’s like to live in fear, always afraid that something bad is going to happen to me or my loved ones. Conversely, I also know the peace that results from trusting in God’s providence. I’d be willing to bet that you have encountered similar experiences. Furthermore, I’ll go out on a limb and guess that you’d prefer to walk by faith rather than by fear. What’s stopping us then? Even though we don’t want to live in fear, many of us are worriers by nature. Speaking from personal experience, this is something that can be overcome with some work on our part and lots of help from the Lord!

As discussed in my first book, *A Worrier’s Guide to the Bible: 50 Verses to Ease Anxieties*, I have a tendency to worry. Ever since I was a young child, I’ve been prone to anxiety. And not just a little anxiety, but *a lot* of anxiety! I’m not sure precisely when this tendency started, but I know that when I was in the first grade I began to worry that my father or mother would die suddenly. Although I had no basis for this fear (my parents were healthy),

it was exacerbated when a second-grade classmate's father passed away unexpectedly. While that fear remained with me, another one was added when I was in the fourth grade. While reading a book on the life of President Theodore Roosevelt, I discovered he developed asthma at a young age. Once that seed was planted in my worry-prone mind, I started to experience some breathing difficulties. As I continued to worry about this, the symptoms seemed to increase. As you can probably guess, a subsequent visit to the doctor revealed no underlying illness and, interestingly, the symptoms vanished once I got a clean bill of health. As the years passed, the fear about asthma was replaced by concerns about diabetes, leukemia, and brain tumors. The pattern was similar. I'd worry about my imaginary disease, convince my parents to take me to the doctor, and feel relief once the tests came back negative. Once I graduated from college and happened to feel some fluttering in my chest, I moved on to worrying about having a heart attack. At this point, things started to get really ugly for me.

Over the next several years, I experienced numerous panic attacks. I ended up in the emergency room on multiple occasions, certain that I was having a heart attack. Eventually a battery of tests revealed that I had no underlying heart problems. And my doctor prescribed medication as a temporary solution. Although the prescription helped my panic attacks, it caused other problems. The pills turned me into an apathetic zombie, which made it difficult to function in my job as a computer programmer.

Reluctant to put me on medication on a regular basis, my doctor suggested I pursue some kind of meditation. His suggestion made me uneasy. While my faith wasn't especially strong at the time, I did go to Mass each week, and I remember thinking I should be able to control my anxiety through my relationship with God. Although I didn't pursue this idea (it was a fleeting thought), a seed was planted. It was a seed that would continue to grow for the next several years. In the meantime, I managed

to convince myself that I was healthy. When I began to doubt, I remembered the medical tests and was able to relax. After several months, I was able to stop taking medicine, and the panic attacks remained more or less under control for the next several years, but my anxiety never went away. Sadly, I accepted that this was how I was built, and I might as well get used to it.

I eventually got married, had children, and lived a relatively uneventful life. In late 2004, however, I started feeling extremely nauseous and began losing weight. My doctor was concerned and ordered tests. It was discovered I had some enlarged lymph nodes in my abdomen. A subsequent visit to a hematologist led to a possible diagnosis of lymphoma, but it couldn't be confirmed for several months. That's all I needed to hear. Fearing I was dying and would soon be meeting the Lord (once a hypochondriac, always a hypochondriac!), I finally decided to embrace my Catholic faith. Until this time, I was a lukewarm Catholic. I went to Mass on Sunday, but that was it. Now it was time to start getting to know the Lord for real! I was surprised to find that I was able to feel great peace even though I was in the midst of a storm. As I continued to pray and immerse myself in Catholic teaching, the peace increased. Eventually the symptoms disappeared (with no definitive diagnosis), but my life was forever changed. Through my prayers, reading the Bible, and studying the teachings of the Church, I now had a genuine, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and I never wanted to return to my old, lukewarm way of life. After many years of living in fear, I finally understood that having a deep, personal relationship with Jesus is the ultimate weapon against fear.

As my love for the Lord increased, I founded the apostolate Following the Truth with the purpose of spreading the good news of the Catholic faith. My desire was not only to share facts about what Catholics believe but to help people develop a personal relationship with Christ. I understood that all the facts

in the world don't mean a thing if we don't know Jesus personally. After reaching out in this manner for a few years, I felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to focus on a group of individuals who desperately needed to hear this message: my fellow worriers. After the release of *A Worrier's Guide to the Bible*, I began speaking extensively about the concept of breaking free from anxiety. These talks continue to this day and have become my most requested topic. When I speak at parishes and conferences, I focus on Bible verses that remind us that God doesn't want us to worry. More importantly, I provide my audience with a simple plan for leaving anxiety behind and moving from fear to faith. As I've traveled the country presenting this well-received advice, a common question has arisen:

"Is this written down anywhere?"

I'm pleased to say that it is now. You're holding it in your hands! This book will help you leave your fear behind and run into the open arms of Jesus. It will provide you with a step-by-step plan for moving from fear to faith. While it's a journey that we'd all like to make, we're often unsure how to proceed. In the pages that follow, you'll learn why fear can be dangerous if not handled correctly, explore some biblical examples of faith in action, and learn how to make the journey from fear to faith in simple and achievable steps. At the end of each chapter, I have included three sections designed to help you:

- 1. Remember:** Focus on the message.
- 2. Reflect:** Apply it to your life.
- 3. Respond:** Offer a prayer in response. Of course, you're always free to speak to the Lord in your own words, but these prayers may help get you started.

Overcoming anxiety is a big job and requires a great deal of effort. If you're like me, you've probably tried and failed many times. If you search the internet, you will find many step-by-step

approaches for eliminating worry from your life. Unfortunately, the majority of them put the entire burden on us. There are a few reasons why this is not a good idea. For one thing, it's not easy for us to just stop worrying, especially if we're anxious by nature. It truly is a big job. More important, these I-can-do-it methods completely remove Christ from the equation. The steps I present in this book do just the opposite. *I recommend we let Jesus do most of the work.* Not only is it just about impossible to overcome anxiety without getting to know Jesus personally, but it's also a bad idea. If you have been unable to stop worrying on your own, be thankful.

Some people manage to stop worrying by using one of the aforementioned mind-over-matter approaches, but they do it without the Lord's help. While these people may be able to give up worrying (at least until they're faced with a catastrophe), doing so without growing closer to Jesus does not increase their chances of spending eternity with him. The method I'm presenting here is based on a deep, personal relationship with Christ. Your anxiety will decrease as you grow closer to him. I will devote an entire chapter to this concept, but for now be aware that a meaningful relationship with the Lord cannot flourish without daily prayer. If we expect to grow in faith (and leave our worries behind), we have to speak to the Lord every day.

In his apostolic letter, *Porta Fidei*, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that the journey of faith will last for the rest of our lives. While this is certainly true, you will begin to see results as soon as you set out on that journey. In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis begins by stating that the "joy of the gospel" fills the hearts of those who encounter Jesus. By following the techniques described in this book, you'll begin to feel more peaceful as your relationship with the Lord grows and you'll trust more deeply in his providence. I also want to point out that, although these steps are simple to understand, they do

involve some work. It's not easy for us to trust God with our life, especially when we've become accustomed to being in control. Turning your life (and your worries) over to the Lord can be difficult, but it's something we must do if we want to experience his peace. It's something we can start doing now.

Whether you're tired of living in fear or you simply long for an increased faith, the following chapters will help you grow closer to Christ. Some of you may feel you're not strong enough or lack the discipline necessary to successfully make this journey. Perfect! You and I have a lot in common. In fact, did you know even St. Paul considered himself to be weak? That's right, the man chosen to spread the Good News to the Gentiles not only considered himself to be weak, but he boasted about it (2 Corinthians 11:30). Why? His weakness forced him to rely more on God. This book is designed for those of us who are weak and who have a tendency to worry about almost everything. The beauty of this method is that the Lord will do the heavy lifting. Our job is to do what we can and let him help us. As someone who is living the technique proposed in this book, I can assure you it works. Be prepared to take it one day at a time and be willing to slip up at least once each day. Yes, you read that right. If you're someone who tends to be a worrier, there will still be those times when you fail to trust and begin to worry. No big deal. The closer you get to Jesus, the less frequently these "slip-ups" will occur. More importantly, you'll recognize it when it happens, deal with it, and move on.

Are you ready to get started? Maybe feeling a bit nervous or skeptical? Let's begin by asking the Lord for help. If you're not sure which words to use, I recommend you repeat the words of the father who approached Jesus and asked him to cure his son, who could not speak (Mark 9:14–29). When the Lord said, "Everything is possible to one who has faith," the man's response says it all:

"I do believe, help my unbelief!"

1

What's Wrong With Fear?

What's so bad about being afraid? All people are afraid of something, aren't they? The first thing we should realize is that **there is nothing wrong with fear**. It is an emotion (sometimes referred to as a passion or feeling) and, therefore, morally neutral. As my late mother-in-law used to say, "Feelings are neither right nor wrong."

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC):

Feelings or passions are emotions or movements of the sensitive appetite that incline us to act or not to act in regard to something felt or imagined to be good or evil (CCC 1763).

In themselves passions are neither good nor evil (CCC 1767).

If you've ever been afraid or are experiencing fear now...relax, it's OK. You're in good company! The Bible says Moses, Elijah, David, Mary, Joseph, and Paul were all afraid (Exodus 2:14, 1 Kings 19:3, 1 Chronicles 13:12, Luke 1:30, Matthew 1:20, and Acts 27:24). Look at that list again. If these folks were afraid, you probably feel a little better about yourself, don't you? Remember there's nothing wrong with being afraid for a legitimate reason (more on that in the next chapter). What matters is how we respond to fear.

Responding to Fear

What is fear? Fear occurs when we sense danger or the perceived threat that something bad is about to happen. It can be a useful emotion, especially when it causes us to take action. In fact, fear can be a GOOD thing because it can act as a wake-up call and motivate us to do something. While there is nothing wrong with fear, we can react to it in a harmful way. Let's look at examples to help illustrate negative and positive responses to fear.

Suppose you're walking down a dark, deserted street and you suddenly notice someone following you. You begin to sweat as you realize that you could be attacked. In this instance there is a chance you're overreacting and everything will be fine, but there's also a chance your fears will prove correct. You have two choices. You can choose to continue walking, hope you're overreacting, let your fears run away with you, but essentially do nothing. On the other hand, you can quickly retreat into a busy store, proceed to a crowded intersection, or maybe even cry out for help. By responding to your fear in a proactive way, you spare yourself from potentially becoming a crime statistic. In one case you responded to your fear by doing nothing, letting your fear control you, and in the other case you responded by doing something positive, taking control of a fearful situation.

Next, imagine you're sitting in your living room and are overwhelmed by the smell of smoke. You get up and look in the kitchen to see it is filled with a thick cloud of smoke. How would you respond? Would you sit back down and begin to worry or would you call the fire department and exit the house? It's obvious that one course of action is productive and the other (worrying) is useless.

Looking at fear on a spiritual level, how would you react if you're afraid you won't be able to go to heaven because you have committed several mortal sins? You have two main choices: You can continue worrying and do nothing, or you can go to confes-

sion and resolve to lead a holier life. By choosing the productive option (confession and fighting against future temptation), you avail yourself of God's mercy, and eternal happiness in heaven is once again possible for you.

In each of these examples, a positive response to fear produced something good. As a result, we can say that fear can be a good thing. Indeed, it can be a *very* good thing. If you weren't afraid, it's likely that you would have taken no action. Therefore, the emotion of fear can be a great blessing in our lives. When I speak at parishes or conferences, I always remind my audience that it's OK to be afraid. Really...it is! Does that make you feel a little better? It should. Don't be afraid to be afraid. As illustrated in the above examples, fear simply tells us we could be in danger. What matters is what we do with that fear. One response to fear that is always wrong is the act of worrying. Why? Because it doesn't do any good. Need proof? Look at what Jesus said about worrying:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, "What are we to eat?" or "What are we to drink?" or "What are we to wear?" All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom (of God)

and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil (Matthew 6:25–34).

Pretty clear, isn't it? It's difficult to misunderstand Jesus' words. Worrying is useless! Notice that he never denies that we need material (temporal) goods. Instead, he reminds us we shouldn't *worry* about them. That makes all the difference in the world! The Lord is not saying we shouldn't earn a living or prepare for the future. He is saying that we shouldn't sit around and worry about what we will do if this, that, or the other thing happens. Worrying and preparation are different.

Here's another biblical example of an incorrect response to fear. In this case, a young man gets the offer of a lifetime but is too afraid to accept.

Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" he answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother"; and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions (Matthew 19:16–22).

Despite having the desire to follow Jesus and get to heaven, the young man is afraid of the potential consequences. He was not willing to give up his comfortable lifestyle, even if it would lead to eternal life. Shockingly, he walked away from eternal happiness because he was afraid that a deeper relationship with Jesus would not satisfactorily meet all his needs.

Now that we know how NOT to respond to fear, let's look at a biblical example of responding to fear in a positive way:

He got into a boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?" (Matthew 8:23–27).

We often look at this incident and criticize the disciples for their lack of faith. This is understandable, and Jesus even calls attention to the fact that their faith is weak. However, if we study the details closely, a different picture begins to emerge. There is no doubt that the disciples were overcome with fear, which is understandable due to the violent storm surrounding them. As we have established, fear is a natural reaction to the many "storms" we face in our lives. Instead of simply worrying uselessly, however, the disciples did exactly what they were supposed to do. They went to Jesus for help. In other words, they prayed. And what did Jesus do? He calmed the storm. In addition, he taught them a lesson about the importance of faith. This is a perfect example of how fear can lead us closer to the Lord. When the "storms" in our lives arise (and they will), it's OK to be afraid. What matters most is what we do with that fear. Do we turn to Jesus (as we should) and ask for help or do we worry and ruminate on a multitude of

negative outcomes that could potentially occur? One choice will bring us closer to Jesus and allow us to experience his peace. The other option will take us away from him and increase our stress. It's really a no-brainer, isn't it?

The great thing about fear is that it gives us the opportunity to invite Jesus more deeply into our hearts. He longs to be involved in every aspect of our lives, but he will not force himself on us. This Bible verse sums up the situation nicely:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).

Every time you encounter a problem or experience fear, Jesus is knocking at your door. He wants to come to your assistance and help you. If you are afraid right now, he is at standing at the door of your heart. The choice to answer the door (or not) is up to you. The Lord respects our free will and will allow us to handle our problems alone, if that's what we want. If you're reading this book there is a good chance you're looking for some relief. You've probably realized that your way isn't working and you need some help. Excellent! We'll discuss how you can go about getting that help in future chapters. For now, all you need to do is recognize the great opportunity fear provides. It gives you the chance to "open the door" and TRULY let Christ into your life.

Remember:

1. Fear alerts us that we could be in danger.
2. It's perfectly acceptable to be afraid; fear is just an emotion.
3. Fear can lead us closer to Christ.
4. Worry is an incorrect response to fear. It accomplishes nothing!
5. Fear should not stop us from doing the right thing.

Reflect:

1. How do I typically respond to fear? Do I act or worry?
2. When I'm afraid, do I draw nearer to or turn away from Christ?
3. How has fear helped me?
4. Do I worry excessively about what could happen in my life?
5. Have I ever failed to do something just because of fear, and do I wish I could overcome this limitation?

Respond:

Jesus, help me to trust you with my life. Instead of worrying, grant me the grace to seek your assistance. I know you love me and care about me. Please grant me your peace and allow me to always remain close to you. Amen.

About the Author

Gary Zimak is a Catholic speaker, lay evangelist, and radio host. In addition to hosting *Following the Truth* on BlogTalkRadio, Gary is a regular guest on EWTN Radio's *Son Rise Morning Show*, *Catholic Connection* with Teresa Tomeo, *Catholic Answers Live*, and Relevant Radio's *Morning Air*.

You can hear Gary's radio show on **BlogTalkRadio** from 8 to 9 PM EST daily or download the podcast from **blogtalkradio.com**. For a list of upcoming shows, speaking engagements, or to request Gary to speak at your next event, visit his website: **followingthetruth.com**.

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