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A Worrier's Guide to the Bible

*50 Verses to
Ease Anxieties*

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Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

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

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Zimak, Gary.

A worrier's guide to the Bible / Gary Zimak.—1st ed.
p. cm.

1. Christian life—Catholic authors. 2. Worry—Religious aspects—Catholic Church. 3.

Worry—Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BX2350.3.Z56 2012

248.8'6—dc23

2012018148

p ISBN 978-0-7648-2163-9

e ISBN 978-0-7648-6728-6

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.

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Printed in the United States of America
16 15 14 / 5 4 3 2
First Edition

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CHAPTER 1

Confusion

Over the course of our lives, we are faced with situations that require us to make decisions. While some decisions are more important than others, they all share one thing in common: The choices we make have an effect on our lives.

Should I take this new job?

Should I buy a new car?

Should I become a priest/sister?

Should I relocate to a new area?

Should I let my kids go away to college?

Should I break off this relationship?

As Christians, we want (or at least we *should* want) to do the right thing at all times. In other words, we should desire to do God's will. Therefore, before making any serious decision, we should ask ourselves the question: *What would God want me to do?*

While that sounds good, it is often easier said than done. Determining the Lord's will for our lives is sometimes difficult and can be a confusing process. This confusion will often lead us to worry. We can take comfort in the fact that the Lord is standing by and ready to help us understand God's will for our lives.

The Bible is filled with stories of ordinary people being chosen to accomplish some very extraordinary tasks. In each of these cases, the Lord provides the necessary guidance. While it may require work on our part (prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, visiting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament), God will never leave us stranded. However, it's also important to remember that although the Lord will help us to know *what* to do, God may not explain *why* we should do it. In these cases, we simply have to trust in the Lord. The important lesson for us is that we should always turn to the Lord in times of confusion. The following verses and corresponding reflections remind us of this opportune choice.

1.

"Now go, I will assist you in speaking and teach you what you are to say" (Exodus 4:12).

One of the most common but costly mistakes we commit when trying to make a decision is neglecting to ask for the Lord's help. We spend much of our time examining options and trying to make the perfect choice. This confusion eventually turns to panic and we feel almost frozen. We obtain information from friends and people who may be more experienced than ourselves and often we are more confused than when we started. Most of us are all too familiar with what it's like to spend a sleepless night, tossing and turning while we ponder a myriad of unacceptable alternatives. Is life really supposed to be *this* difficult?

Moses felt he was unqualified to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, so he asked the Lord to reconsider. Reminding God of his lack of speaking skills, the reluctant leader pressured the Lord to choose someone more qualified. Amazingly, even after God promised to give him the words, Moses remained adamant about his lack of qualifications. In an example of amazing patience, the Lord proposed that Aaron, Moses' brother and

an eloquent speaker, could act as Moses' spokesman. Finally, Moses accepted his mission.

What was Moses' main problem? He ignored the Lord's offer of assistance and thought that he would have to do everything himself. He somehow managed to disregard the fact that the Lord promised not only to assist him but to actually give him the words. When we struggle to make a decision without asking for the Lord's help, aren't we actually doing the same thing? Many of us like to be in control and, as a result, completely take God out of the picture. We are determined to solve our problems by ourselves, and when we run into trouble and become confused, we worry. The cause of this is often due to our excessive pride or lack of faith. Although it's not easy to admit, we sometimes feel weak when we have to ask for the Lord's help or don't really think that he will help us. Instead, we'll spend the night tossing and turning, worrying about what to do. Does this make a lot of sense?

If you are struggling to make a decision and want to make the right choice, do you really believe that God will not assist you? The Lord is always with us, but we need to ask and listen. How do I reach out to my children who no longer attend Mass? What is the best response when people attack the Church? Should I take a new job that requires me to relocate? When facing a challenge in your life, turn to the Lord for help. Ask God what you should do. While it's highly unlikely that you are going to hear him speak to you out loud, you will be able to *hear* the Lord's answer in the silence of your heart. If something is in accordance with God's will, you'll often experience a feeling of peace and contentment.

The Lord knows that, just like Moses, we can be stubborn at times. Unfortunately, by refusing to rely on God's help, we prolong our agony and run the risk of making poor decisions. If we turn to the Lord for guidance, we'll not only experience peace, but we can be sure we're following his will for our lives. What could be better than that?

Lord, help me to remember that you are always there to help me when I am confused. Give me the grace to relinquish control and be willing to ask for (and accept) your direction. Amen.

2.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go” (Hebrews 11:8).

Life is always easier when we know what to expect. Even though we never know what will happen for certain, we like to have an idea of what lies in store for us. Unexpected emergencies and crises can really become an occasion to panic. Even bad weather can be enough to put us in a foul mood or cause moderate to severe grumbling. Personally, I like to know what's ahead for me each day. Unfortunately, life doesn't work that way. As we travel life's highway, there are many twists and turns along the way. God allows things to happen in our lives in order to help us achieve our salvation. Our response to these events can make a big difference in where we end up after our earthly life is over.

As Christians, we have much in common with Abraham. We are all called by Almighty God to travel an unknown road that can lead us to our promised inheritance. Of course, that unknown road is known as *life* and the inheritance is *heaven*. Just like Abraham, we are invited to set out and follow the Lord, not knowing all of the details. How do we respond? Do we respond with faithful acceptance (like Abraham) or do we complain about uncertainties and inconveniences?

Promised numerous descendants by the Lord, Abraham had no children and a wife who was elderly. Still, he trusted that God's word was trustworthy. When Sarah miraculously conceived and bore a son (Isaac), Abraham was

asked to sacrifice that son (Genesis 22:1–19). Talk about a leap of faith!

How do we react when asked by the Lord to carry an unexpected cross such as illness, unemployment or the death of a loved one? Often we get upset declaring, *it's too confusing! I don't know what I'm going to do! I need more information!* Abraham obeyed the Lord's commands without knowing the fullness of God's design. That is the meaning of faith. If all of the facts are known, faith becomes irrelevant. Can we honestly say that we trust the Lord as much as Abraham did?

Although we should always be willing to trust God even when we don't have all of the answers, there is nothing wrong with asking the Lord to help us understand the confusing events in our lives. *Why did I lose my job? Why did my father die? Why is it so difficult for me to trust?*

These are all valid questions and can be directed to the Lord. The Lord accompanies us and desires to calm our fears. Sometimes, God will even provide concrete reasons for the struggle, but not always. Over the course of my life, I have received some surprising answers to my questions. There were other times that I did not receive answers. I've learned to view these occasions as opportunities to express my love for the Lord by trusting, even when I don't understand the way forward.

Due to the fact that we are human, confusion will always be a part of our lives. Things will happen that just "don't make sense." It is impossible to understand everything that God does (Isaiah 55:8–9), and accepting this will bring us deep peace.

I realize that I'm a "fair weather" Christian at times, Jesus, and I need your help. Give me the strength to trust in you even when I don't know why things are happening in my life. Amen.

3.

"Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

Have you ever gotten up in the middle of the night and tried to make your way across the dark bedroom? You proceed with caution, with hands extended, hoping to feel any obstacles before you walk into them. If you're like me, it's the shoes or boxes lying on the floor that trip you up as you unsuccessfully attempt to navigate in the dark. Let's face it, it's a lot easier to walk around when you can see than when you can't. Instead of walking face first into the wall, you can simply walk around it. Rather than doing an unintentional flip over a box on the floor, you can easily step over it.

In a similar way, life is full of darkness. We are surrounded by obstacles and dangers that can tempt us, possibly causing us to fall into sin. Without a *light* to help us navigate the roads of our daily lives, we have the same chance of falling or running into a wall as we do in our darkened bedroom. When we fall by sinning, however, the damage can be a lot worse than a stubbed toe or a bruised arm. It can affect our eternal salvation.

Fortunately there is some good news, or should I say, *Good News*. Jesus Christ is the light that we need to keep us on the right path. His assurance that Christians will not walk in darkness should make us very happy. Once we turn our lives over to the Lord and follow Christ's teachings, we no longer have to stumble through life frightened and confused.

The key point, however, is that we must actively *follow* Jesus. This implies obeying his teachings and not just claiming membership in the Church. Many Catholics today feel that they can pick and choose the Church teachings they follow, disregarding the ones with which they disagree. This phenomenon, known as cafeteria Catholicism, is a dangerous practice that prohibits one from being a true follower of Christ. If we enthrone ourselves as the ultimate authority for deciding moral beliefs, can we possibly say we are followers of Jesus? In fact, instead, we are following ourselves.

How exactly does our Lord reveal his light to us? One very powerful way is through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In this document, we are blessed to have a compilation of two thousand years of Church teaching. Consisting of Bible verses, official Vatican teaching, and commentary by the early Church Fathers and saints, this masterpiece summarizes the teaching of the Catholic Church in a useful and effective way.

Jesus is truly the Light of the World. Remaining close to him will ensure that we don't walk in the darkness. As with any light, however, we need to flip the switch in order for it to shine. Our Lord founded a Church (Matthew 16:18) and helps us find salvation. Through the Church, God provides us with an unending source of light in order to illuminate the darkness and walk treacherous roads through life. We are invited to do our part by flipping the switch and using the light to guide our steps.

Dear Jesus, thank you for being a light in the darkness. Help me to love and follow the teachings of your Church so that I don't stumble on the road that leads to eternal life. Amen.

4.

“Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them?” (Luke 18:7).

Why doesn't God answer me?

Have you ever asked or thought of asking this question? If so, you're not alone. At some point in our lives, we've all been faced with a situation in which God seems unresponsive. It can be especially frustrating when we are trying to make a decision and don't know what to do. We turn to the Lord for advice, praying for an answer to our problem. If you're like me, there have probably been times when you've given up, thinking that God wants you to handle this one on your own. Take it from me that this is not a good idea. While there are times when God says no, we shouldn't assume that the Lord doesn't hear us just because our answer isn't coming fast enough.

Some supporting evidence for this advice can be found in the parable of the Persistent Widow, found in the Gospel of Luke. One thing I like about this parable is that Luke tells us exactly what it means. This removes the guesswork and is perfect for nonbiblical scholars. According to the evangelist, this parable is about the “need to pray always and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1). Pretty clear, isn't it? God desires our goodness out of love for us, so if we pray for something harmful or sinful (even though we may not consider it so), we might be initially distressed at the will of the Father. But when we sincerely need something, we are encouraged to keep praying for the Lord's answer, which could be in the form of an affirming

yes, a definite *no*, a gentle reminder to *keep praying and wait*, or simply a *deep peace in the moment*.

In this parable, the dishonest judge finally grants the widow's request, not because he cares about doing the right thing, but because of her persistence. As with most of Jesus' parables, we have to understand the point that Jesus is trying to make and be careful not to get hung up on the details. Christ often uses hyperbole (exaggeration) in order to make a point. In this case, the Lord isn't necessarily trying to compare our relationship with God to that of the woman and the evil judge but is instead trying to make the point that we should be persistent in prayer.

Why did Jesus use such a radical example, involving a judge who granted a woman's request only to get rid of her? First, it got the listeners' attention and also because using a simple example made the parable more understandable. In order to drive the point home, Jesus contrasts God with the dishonest judge. In other words, if this evil man eventually answers the woman's request, imagine how much more the good Lord will answer the prayers of those who love him.

If you're confused and praying to the Lord for direction, don't stop! Even if things in your life are looking bleak and it appears that God is ignoring you, keep asking! This parable reminds us of the need to be persistent in prayer. Why isn't God answering? Maybe it is because the time isn't right, because you still need to learn something, or because God desires you to be persistent in prayer. Until you receive an answer, imitate the persistent widow and *keep on asking!*

Lord, please help me to be patient and have greater trust in your perfect timing. When I'm tempted to stop praying, allow me to recall the story of the persistent widow who never gave up, even when her initial requests went unanswered. Amen.

5.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely” (Proverbs 3:5).

At first glance, this verse seems to imply that Christians should not think for themselves. If we really trust in the Lord with all our heart, God will make all the decisions for us. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your point of view), that's not what this verse means. In reality, it cautions us against thinking that we're smarter than God.

I am blessed to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, and I have the privilege of bringing Jesus to the residents of a local nursing home. A few days ago, a woman approached me asking to receive the Eucharist. I was confused because her name wasn't on our list. I asked her if she was Catholic and confirmed that she was. I gave her Communion and inquired if she was a new resident. She told me that she's been there for a while and proceeded to explain why she wasn't on the *Catholic* list. When her husband died, she became angry at God and stopped receiving holy Communion and wanted nothing to do with the Church. But now, she told me, “I came to my senses.”

How many times have you heard a similar story or done this yourself? Something happens in your life such as the death of a spouse, a divorce, the inability to become pregnant, and you begin to wonder why God would allow these things to happen, thus abandoning or pulling away from the Lord. While God understands that doing this is just a means of coping with

grief, it is important to remember that the Lord is also our comforter and deliverer, desiring to grace us always, especially in times of great distress.

It's hard to argue that anyone had more things go wrong than Job. To this day, he remains the ultimate example of Murphy's Law¹. If something could go wrong in his life, it did. Initially Job accepted his sufferings without complaining, but eventually he made the mistake of trying to figure out the tragic happenings in his life. God (not so subtly) put Job on the spot and asked probing questions: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?" (Job 38:4–5).

After several more unanswerable questions from the Lord, Job finally *got it* and repented. We make the same mistake every time we lash out at God or the Church because we don't like or understand something that happens in our lives. In his infinite wisdom, God allows things to happen which we don't understand. One of the best examples of this happened 2,000 years ago on a hill named Calvary. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified by the very people he came to save. What about this event makes sense? Why would God allow this to happen? What good could possibly result from this barbaric act? Of course, we all know that this senseless act of violence resulted in the salvation of all humankind.

When God allows bad things to happen in our lives, there is always a reason. We may not always be able to understand the reason, but in these precise moments we must trust. Accepting the will of God will bring us great peace.

¹ An old adage that states: "anything that can go wrong certainly will."

Sometimes we get angry when we don't get our own way, Lord. We think that we know what's best for our lives instead of trusting in you. Please increase our trust and help us to always remember that your wisdom is infinite and your will is perfect. Amen.

6.

"Listen! I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Revelation 3:20, New Revised Standard Version of the Bible).

I often tell the story of how I was baptized into the Catholic faith as an infant, went to Catholic school for twelve years and attended Mass every week, but had no real relationship with the Lord for most of that time. In late 2004, I started experiencing some strange medical symptoms (weight loss, nausea, dizziness) and had to confront my mortality. I made a decision to dedicate the remainder of my life to learning more about the Catholic faith and sharing it with others. Eventually, my symptoms disappeared and no definitive diagnosis was made. My life, however, changed drastically as I finally discovered what it was like to know the Lord. At first, it may appear that Jesus waited until 2004 to knock on my door. In reality, Christ was knocking for several years and was waiting for *me* to open the door.

When faced with a decision or confused about events in our lives, we often forget to ask for the Lord's assistance. As is stated in the above verse from the Book of Revelation, Jesus won't force us to follow. He'll knock and call but is ultimately always waiting for us to open the door. This concept is beautifully illustrated in the painting *Christ at Heart's Door* by Warner Sallman. In this familiar piece of artwork, Jesus is depicted knocking at a closed door. The most notable feature of the image is the absence of a doorknob

on the outside of the door. The common interpretation of this anomaly is that our Lord is always knocking at the door of our heart, but it must be opened from the inside. Christ will never force his way into our hearts.

When faced with a difficult or confusing problem, what's the first thing we usually do, besides worry? Generally, we'll seek out an expert who can help us make a good decision. Whether we're dealing with car problems, parenting issues, or relationship problems, we try to find someone who's been there, done that. It's sad that, even when faced with critical issues, we often neglect to consult the ultimate expert—Jesus! Because “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14), Jesus knows firsthand what it's like to experience the difficulties of life. While still retaining his divinity, the Lord “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Philippians 2:7) and voluntarily submitted to the inconveniences that go with being human.

Jesus understands what it's like to walk in our shoes and waits patiently to be invited into our hearts and our lives. He is ready to assist us with our difficult decisions and grant us peace in the midst of turmoil. We can encounter him through the pages of the Bible and through prayer, but there is another way in which he is present in the fullest way possible. Jesus waits for us, often ignored and unnoticed, in the tabernacle of every Catholic church and in numerous adoration chapels around the world. The same Lord and Savior who walked the face of the earth 2,000 years ago is waiting silently for us to pay him a visit. While we are there, we can tell him we love him and ask for assistance in dealing with our problems. Jesus is knocking and wants to be a part of your life. Will you open the door and let him in?

Thank you for knocking on the door of my heart, Lord. Please come in and help me to be a better person. Amen.

7.

“Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?’” (Luke 24:32)

When faced with a difficult problem in our life, wouldn't it be great if we could call Jesus on his cell phone and ask for advice? It would take the guesswork out of our tough decisions and provide comfort in times of uncertainty. Although the Church teaches that the Lord speaks to us through the Bible, it's often difficult to hear his words or understand their meaning in the pages of sacred Scripture.

Although every Christian denomination claims to follow the Bible, there is a great deal of disagreement about biblical interpretation. Let's face it, the Bible can be confusing at times. Without an authoritative interpreter, the Bible can become a matter of personal opinion. If one asked fifty people to read the same passage and explain its meaning, you could easily end up with fifty different interpretations. In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke emphasizes the need for an authoritative interpreter when he tells of the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch:

Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, “Go and join up with that chariot.” Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and

said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him.

ACTS 8:27–31

Another example can be found in Saint Luke's account of the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. They were joined by a very special tutor who helped them to understand the Scriptures: "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). The tutor, Jesus, was not recognized by these travelers until the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:30) opened their eyes. After the Lord vanished, they expressed their frustration at failing to recognize him.

In the biblical account of the journey to Emmaus, only one of the travelers is named (Cleopas). Although not spelled out in the Bible, the other pilgrim also has a name. Depending on the situation, that name is Gary or Joe or Cheryl or Eileen, etc. Many times *we* are that other individual, not realizing that Jesus is right beside us helping us to understand the Bible. How? Through the teaching office (the magisterium) of the Catholic Church. While not offering a line-by-line interpretation, the Church gives us a framework that helps us better comprehend the meaning of the Bible.

The Church encourages us to read the Bible frequently. For in the pages of sacred Scripture we hear the Lord speaking directly to us. However, the Bible should not be read in a vacuum. Understanding Church doctrine will help to make sense out of what could be a confusing book and prevent us from possibly deriving an erroneous interpretation. If not for the Church's assistance, we'd be as confused as the eunuch struggling to read the Book of Isaiah.

*Lord, help us to appreciate your guidance as we read the Bible.
Give us the desire to learn the Church's teaching in order to
better hear your voice through the pages of sacred Scripture.
Amen.*
