

**COMMENTARY ABOUT “ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION” WEEK #7 –  
ADULT SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT (OCT 26, 2025)**

**Video by Father Paul Truebenbach – “Anxious about Anxiety” (June 2023)**

- 1) Book by Victor Frankl, “Man’s Search for Meaning” – a Jew in the concentration camps in Germany.
  - a. He noticed something about the other prisoners in the camps:
  - b. There were those who seemed to survive beyond all odds, and those who seemed to succumb and die even though they seemed strong and virile.
  - c. He began to look for an explanation that separates those who gave in and died and those who continued to exist on and sometimes to thrive.
  - d. He found a simple answer to this:
    - i. Those who felt they still had something to live for would continue living.
    - ii. Those who felt they had nothing to live for would cease to exist.
  - e. The driving force in someone’s will to live was a sense of greater purpose.
  - f. If someone still had the hope that he would see his spouse again, he would continue to suffer through any sort of torments and illnesses he might endure because that hope kept him alive.
  - g. As soon as he got word that his wife had died, within weeks or maybe even days he himself would perish.
  - h. The second item that Frankl noted:
    - i. He thought it was very significant that was a smaller point in the book but he noted that when we fight against negative emotions and distress that fight against them only compounds them, i.e. makes them worse. We increase our anxiety actually wondering if we will ever defeat them.
    - ii. However, if you accept them and delve right into the middle of them, and don’t fight against them, but actually allow them to occur, somehow they lose a lot of their power.
- 2) A second figure, around the same time in similar but different circumstances, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was placed in the Russian gulags. He came to a lot of the same conclusions but slightly different ways. He and Frankl share a lot of their thoughts together. Alexander stands out for us because he was an Orthodox Christian.
  - a. He ultimately came to the belief that the explanation for the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was quite simple. There was one thing that made the horrors of communism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century possible and that is that men have forgotten God.
  - b. In fact, he gave a whole speech after receiving a religious award with this title, and you can search for it on line and find it readily, *Men Have Forgotten God*.

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- 3) It is a fascinating thing if you look at the four Gospels that sum up three years of teachings and works of Christ. There is far more of those things that were not written than those things that were, and we are told this at the end of the Gospel of John. If all the works that Christ had done and all that things that He said were to be written, all the books in the world could not contain them. The most important and essential things were placed in the Gospels for us, for our instruction they were placed there.
- 4) Within that small amount of three years’ worth of ministry and teachings and miracles, Matthew made sure inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit to include words about anxiety. Anxiety is a vicious trap for us when we really succumb to it. Because what does anxiety do, we have anxiety because we don’t have control of the world around us. Unexpected things happen and can happen that spikes our anxiety.
- 5) We think that we can cure our anxiety by creating more control of the world around us. So, we try to control the things and the people around us to thus decrease our anxiety. However, the desire to control produces a greater awareness that no matter how much control we exert we are not really in control.
- 6) The world around us and the people around us are going to do things that we don’t expect, and that awareness increases our anxiety. Matthew 6:25 – 34 : When you delve into the Gospel you see that there is a great deal of wisdom that is put forth for us. “Stop it” is not what Christ actually says even though He begins with “don’t be anxious”. However, then He tells us why and how! The Gospel lesson ends with the words: “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”
- 7) **Matthew 6 (New International Version) - Do Not Worry**  
25 “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 clothes?** 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
- 8) What does this ultimately mean? It ultimately means that Victor Frankl was correct! Christ instructions to “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness” suggests two things:

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- 1) your life needs to be aimed at a greater and eternal purpose, this is the Kingdom of Heaven; the purpose that Victor Frankl says we must live for Christ gives us, we find our purpose in Him and His Kingdom, and 2) He says don't fight the anxiety head on but rather seek first the Kingdom, this is Christ' rule and reign over our life, it's the recognition that Christ is an active King directing our life, and seek righteousness.
- 9) The idea here is to have greater goals than the simple control that we want to exert over our life. In other words, like Frankl says rather than a negative fight against our anxiety, turn that anxiety into a positive fight for trust and hope in Christ, and for righteousness or purity of heart.
- 10) This gives our anxiety purpose. In times of anxiety, we have to really ask: what is it that we really want? Why is it that we want to get rid of this anxiety so much, why is this anxiety such a cancer upon our souls and our emotions? What is it about this anxiety that we don't like? But what we want is freedom from anxiety! We want to feel peace in its place! In addition, we want that weight of that anxiety removed from our consciousness. So, when we give our anxiety purpose, what we see in our anxiety is an opportunity for growth! Again, rather than fight the anxiety, just acknowledge it, see it, and recognize it. Subsequently, use the anxiety to seek the Kingdom of Heaven and Christ' righteousness.
- 11) So how do we put this into practice? In one moment, I may feel anxiety rise up in myself. The first thing I do is to recognize that my anxiety is giving me a false sense that I need to control the world the world around me. I also have to recognize that the exertion of control is only going to increase my anxiety, it won't fix it. So, instead I have to seek something greater! So what do I seek – as Christ says I seek the Kingdom of God, and that Kingdom is one in which I recognize that Christ is the true King, meaning that He is in control!
- 12) In other words, I have to give over my anxiety to Christ! And what is it that I want more than control of my life, I want to grow in the virtues that help me grow in righteousness. Those virtues are first trust in Christ, and trust in Christ leads secondly to humility. I then seek to actualize these things, not to leave them as mere ideas but to put them into action. So, I make the Kingdom present and engage in righteousness by prayer. This is deceptively simple. This is the way that the Christian approaches anxiety.
- 13) Instead of fighting the anxiety head on, I have utilized it as a fuel for the spiritual life! I have struggled well and have grown!
- 14) It is the thing that causes me to run to Christ more fervently, and actually grow in humility and trust in Him. These are the goals of the spiritual life in the first place! Hence, anxiety becomes the teacher of the spiritual life. Here are some other bullet points in life with the subject of anxiety:

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- a. Get off of SocialMedia and stay away from the news. Note: Some that do have found their lives to be more peaceful.
- b. Practice actively thanking God for things throughout the day; spend more time seeing and recognizing Christ’ blessings and thanking Him for them than being anxious. Thank God so much that it outweighs the anxiety!
- c. Read the lives of the Saints, especially the modern Saints to see just how present Christ, and the Panagia, and the Saints are in our lives and how much Christ really loves us. See how Christ’s Kingdom may manifest in a person who fully trusts in Him actually looks. Read the lives of the Saints a little bit everyday!
- d. Finally, the fourth one, a secular piece of advice but it helps, exercise! Therapists have found that 20 minutes of exercise a day is more effective than any depression or anxiety medicine on the market.

**Father Paul Truebenbach – “Advice for Anxiety and Depression” (Roots of Orthodoxy video 11 min)**

- 1) Today everyone feels alienated and so many people really struggle with this (anxiety).
- 2) This is one of the paradoxes of this world of psychology that has now had some kind of a boom in the past 100 to 125 years. While psychology has helped us to understand ourselves better, in many ways it has done as much damage as it has done good!
- 3) The main way that it has done damage to us is that it has caused us to believe that however we feel and whatever we think, is really important! And that we need to think more about ourselves, and really the more you think about yourself the higher degree of anxiety and depression that you are going to experience.
- 4) The way to stop having anxiety and depression is to stop living in your own head, stop thinking about yourself so much, and stop relying on yourself so much.
- 5) When I have parishioners come to me who struggle with anxiety and / or depression, I give them a list of things to do (not all that complex):
  - a. #1 – go exercise, I tell them to do that first, 30 minutes a day.
  - b. #2 – go build, fix, or clean something; do something where you can see the results of your own work; the sense of accomplishment when you look at the results of your efforts!
  - c. #3 – go pray, at least 30 minutes; preferably the Jesus prayer and possibly read the Psalms; make sure the prayer is an encounter, don’t just read or say the prayers; really “be with Christ”.
  - d. #4 – find something you can do that is really meaningful for someone else; go live for someone else since you have just lived for Christ in prayer;

**NOTE: ONCE YOU HAVE DONE THOSE FOUR THINGS, GO SIT ON YOUR COUCH AND BE AS DEPRESSED AS YOU WANT TO BE!!!**

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- 6) The concept of self-love is really destructive. When Christ says “love your neighbor as yourself” a lot of people will interpret that and say see you can’t love others unless you love yourself first. I don’t think that was what Christ was calling us to. I think the way that He is calling us to that is that if you want to be fulfilled, forget yourself! St. Siloan and St. Sophrony talk about loving Christ so much that to the world it looks like self-hatred! This is largely what asceticism is (i.e. a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from worldly pleasures through self-discipline, self-imposed poverty, and simple living).
- 7) We afflict the body, not because we are anti-body and not because we hate ourselves, but because we love Christ so much, and we love our neighbor so much that we really don’t give ourselves any thought.
- 8) So what is the way to be fulfilled, empty yourself! It is really key that people understand this, humility is not hating yourself, it’s not looking down on yourself, it’s not beating yourself up, it’s not afflicting yourself, humility is to empty yourself!
- 9) The point of Orthodox Christianity is not to be a good Christian, you are never going to be a good Christian in many ways. **The point is to be an empty Christian!** If you can empty yourself out of egoism, which is where a lot of this self-love movement comes from, then suddenly your heart becomes an empty vessel that can be filled with the grace of God, that’s what makes man fulfilled! Hence, I do not think that self-love is a path that we need to follow, I think that is a dangerous path and I think it is way to easily twisted to greater egoism and selfishness and bitterness. This is to the point that people are defining their own sense of truth. I think the way is to empty yourself out!
- 10) Is there a way that we can aspire to be better than ourselves and still be a humble Orthodox Christian? The answer is absolutely! This doesn’t say we empty ourselves to become nothings but rather we want to take the gifts of God and we want to make them flourish as much as possible.
- 11) The real question is: what is my heart yearning for? Let’s say you are an attorney, and you need to be the best paid attorney and most respected attorney in the city, there is some disorder in your heart about that. But what you really need to do is follow Christ as best you can and be the best Christian man that you can! In that, you are striving to take the gifts that God has given you and live them out to the best of your ability. I think this is a much healthier path. You are not trying to fill yourself with worldly things but simply trying to take those gifts and utilize as best you can. They (the gifts) need to be aimed in a virtuous way.
- 12) Once you ceased striving for virtue, you are going to destroy yourself in those things. This is why you need to be cautious and why you frankly need a spiritual father to guide you. This allows you to ask those questions such as is it worth it for me to strive for this promotion or new position? The question comes down to your heart! What is your heart guiding you to? If this is going to destroy you than no!

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- 13) I think what is going on in the world today is a crisis of identity. We are trying to figure out who we are, and it goes back to the same sin as we see in the Garden of Eden. It is like trying to be like God without God. They were told if you disobey Him and eat of the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you'll become like God which is what they really wanted. So in trying to become like God, they ended up disobeying God. They were trying to become like God and closer to God without God.
- 14) This is what we were talking about earlier – if sin means to turn away from God you can't get closer to God by turning away from Him and going in the other direction. This is exactly what is happening in the world today, people are saying how can I become more of who I really am and we're called to be gods by grace. We are called to unite with God and all that God is by nature we will become by grace. However, how can I do that in my own way? How can I do that apart from the Commandments? How can I do that apart from this life of purity and righteousness that I have been called to?
- 15) So, it comes down to the simple question of pride! Can I forge my own path and then have all the fruits, the rewards, the glories that God has promised for me even though I turned against Him in the process? In doing so the world has sort of become mad with this. Essentially you are trying to take a creation, make it depart from the Creator who is not just the Creator but the image of the One that we are fashioned after, and come to good results. This is impossible!
- 16) Everybody wants to live for purpose but I don't think we have done a good job as a culture (we have been antithetical to this – the opposite) of asking what makes for a worthwhile purpose and meaning.
- 17) I think a worthwhile purpose and meaning has to have the following attributes:
- a. It has to be based on truth; if we are living a lie what is the purpose of it?
  - b. It has to be unchanging: because if my purpose and meaning is a certain way today but changes again tomorrow then why do I want to live out that purpose and meaning when it is not going to last?
  - c. Thirdly, it has to extend beyond death: because if my purpose and meaning are going to die with me in the grave, then what does it matter in the end, none of it matters?
- 18) I came up with that list years ago. It always felt a little bit dry to me, it always felt a little bit sterile. However, then I realized something that is very important – that even if we have all these three things, the reason these are sterile is because man is made for love: to love and to be loved, a circular relationship of love. This means that purpose and meaning have to be based in love. Think about this – if it is based in love it can't be impersonal, it can't be based in ideology, it can't be based in philosophy, it has to be personal! This means that there is only one figure who fulfills all four of those! There's only one person because truth has to be based on a person and that is Christ! Christ

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said that “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”; Christ is Truth, truth is not a concept, it’s not an idea, it is a person. Christ is Truth, He is unchanging day to day, Christ has destroyed death, and Christ love us. This is the only path to the fulfillment of man.

- 19) I think that as long as people reject this out of pride because they say I don’t like what Christ calls me to. He won’t let me just say I want to define truth for myself. I want to forge my own path. Out of love, He lets you do that but you can’t demand the same rewards when you depart from the path that He laid for us.