

## ***Content Is Not Your Friend*** ***PART ONE***

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*This month's newsletter, September 2024, is the first of two parts. Next month's newsletter, October 2024, will continue the discussion.*

**T**ake a deep breath. Find a place where you can be calm and collected. This month's reflection will challenge the root of your belief system about scrupulosity and OCD. Take your time and read each sentence, making sure you understand it before moving on. This reflection offers an essential insight into your struggle with scrupulosity. It may make you

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uncomfortable—that is OK. What is important is that you try to apply what you are reading here to your own experience and see if it holds true.

What I share with you in this reflection is intended solely for people who are struggling with scrupulosity and OCD. Most of it will not make sense to those who do not suffer from this disorder; it will seem contradictory to acceptable spiritual practices and disciplines. This reflection is not for them. It is for you—the person who struggles and desires to become freer and live life as it is intended, unburdened by constant fear and anxiety.

The content that is the subject of your OCD is not your real concern and should not be the object of your attention. Content is the **trigger** of your OCD. Content is not your solution. Let me repeat this important distinction: content is the **trigger**; it is not the solution. Reflect upon your experience of OCD and recognize the truth of this statement. As Scripture says, write it in your heart.

You could answer all the questions and doubts generated by the content you are obsessed with, and by the time you have it “figured out,” your OCD will have moved on to another question or concern. The only one loyal to the content is you, not your OCD. It could care less about the subject

matter of the content; all your OCD cares about is that the content triggers your anxiety. It makes no difference if the content is an obsession with germs or with sin, real or imagined. For OCD, there is no fundamental difference.

Again, obsessive and compulsive behaviors are triggered by content. If you have scrupulosity, the content that triggers your OCD is religious in nature. For instance, you might believe your thoughts are about sin. You may engage in an action because you believe it is demanded by God or required for a good confession. You might be convinced it is necessary to worry about past sins, or you may repeatedly think about whether something is a mortal or venial sin. You may believe that you are wrestling with fear of the unknown or eternal damnation. Each of these assumptions, which appear real and convincing to you, are false.

To OCD, all these thoughts and concerns are simply content to foster your anxiety, nothing more. The content is the trigger for your pain, suffering, and struggles. Your OCD uses many familiar and scary words, but they have no meaning. Your OCD only cares that the words generate anxiety. Your content is not religious; it is not coming from God. It is not indicative of your spiritual self nor descriptive of your relationship with God. Your content is OCD, masquerading as something important.

When you try to answer the questions that the content poses, you engage in a waste of time and energy. All your effort, dedication, questioning, and attention to detail are not helpful. Rather, these things feed your OCD and provide it with fuel to make you feel ashamed, guilty, anxious, or depressed.

The only healthy and grace-filled response to managing your OCD is to deprive it of content—to abandon the pursuit of determining the definitive answers to the questions that flood your mind. In the process of starving your scrupulosity of

content, you will effectively eliminate, or at least begin to manage, the triggers generated by the content.

What does this response mean practically? First, you must understand and remember that content triggers your OCD. This response therefore urges you to stop wasting energy with obsessive questions and doubts about the content. Any attention you pay to the content simply energizes and enables your OCD, allowing for continued suffering. It is profoundly difficult to accept that scrupulosity is not a spiritual

issue—it is a mental disorder that uses spiritual content to generate anxiety, guilt, and shame.

The second step to depriving your OCD of content is the practiced choice of moving deliberately into the present moment, the only place where OCD does not thrive. OCD needs the past or the future to

foster worry and anxiety. The present moment starves scrupulosity of oxygen; it struggles and loses power for the moment. From a spiritual perspective, the present moment is also the home of the Eternal Now. It is the place where God dwells. In divinity, there is no time—no past, no future. All things are simply what they are during this moment, in this place, and, most importantly, in the fullness of love.

How must you apply this remedy to your life? You must apply it consistently and with no exception. You must apply it with focus and commitment, providing no wiggle room. You must apply it—particularly when referring to religious scrupulosity—often in contrast to the normal, prevailing spiritual practices and disciplines. You must apply it with the conviction that it is the only correct and necessary application, even if it may be misunderstood by popular religious leaders or canonized saints. ✨

*NEXT MONTH:* Practical rules to deprive your OCD of content.

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# The Value of Humanity

Pope St. John Paul II reflects on the goodness and value of the human person—you!



Fresco of Pope St. John Paul II  
JORISVO / SHUTTERSTOCK

In our bodies, we are a mere speck in the vast created universe, but by virtue of our souls, we transcend the whole material world. I invite you to reflect on what makes each one of you truly marvelous and unique. Only a human being like you can think and speak and share your thoughts in different languages with other human beings all over the world, and through that language express the beauty of art and poetry and music and literature and the theater, and so many other uniquely human accomplishments. And most important of all, only God's precious human beings are capable of loving.

—*Homily at Central Park, 1995*

Life is a talent entrusted to us so that we can transform it and increase it, making it a gift to others. No man is an iceberg drifting on the ocean of history. Each one of us belongs to a great family [with his or her] own place and own role to play. Selfishness makes people deaf and dumb; love opens eyes and hearts, enabling people to make that original and irreplaceable contribution which, together with the thousands of deeds of so many brothers and sisters, often distant and unknown, converges to form the mosaic of charity which can change the tide of history.

—*Message for World Youth Day, 1996*

Each of us is an individual, a person, a creature of God, one of his children, someone very special whom God loves and for whom Christ died. This identity of ours determines the way we must live, the way we must act, the way we must view our mission in the world. We come from God, we depend on God, God has a plan for us—a plan for our lives, for our bodies, for our souls, for our future. This plan for us is extremely important—so important that God became man to explain it to us.

—*Meeting with Youth, New Orleans, 1987.*

Adapted from *Pope John Paul II: In My Own Words*, compiled and edited by Anthony Chiffolo (Liguori Publications, 2005), 813771. To order, visit [Liguori.org](http://Liguori.org) or call 800-325-9521.

**Q.** I recently heard a Catholic evangelist state something to the effect that “grave matter and mortal sin are the exception, not the rule.” Is he saying what I think he is saying?

**A.** If your question means, “Is this Catholic evangelist on track with his statement?”, my answer is, “Most assuredly.” Despite the many social media commentators who are generally competing for an audience and unconcerned about theological casualties, grave matter and mortal sin are serious but are not lurking in every thought, decision, challenge, or discernment. It is quite possible to engage in daily living, make mistakes, be sorry for them, and never once come close to either grave matter or mortal sin. This is what it means to live as a human being who engages in everyday life.

**Q.** My young children were very inattentive at Sunday Mass, and I spent most of the time trying to get them settled. Is it necessary for me to go to Mass again because I was not paying attention?

**A.** “Let the children come to me” (Matthew 19:14). Your children were not a distraction, and your parenting was not a distraction. You attended Mass wonderfully, fully, and completely. There is no need to attend Mass twice because of that. You celebrated the Eucharist as a family. What a blessing!

### Additional Resources Online for Those Seeking Help

Liguori Publications offers resources online that people with scrupulosity have found very helpful:

For helpful videos, please visit [YouTube/Catholic OCD](#).

For pastoral care and spiritual direction opportunities, please visit [managingscrupulosity.com](#).

For direct support and to access new helpful videos, please visit [Patreon.com/CatholicOCD](#). (Patreon offers a direct mail feature that can be used to answer your personal questions and concerns.)

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