

I am grateful for this opportunity. /

Sadly, I have to leave the EU on
May 27... /

I will miss graduation. /

And many of you will not be here /
when I return in September. /

That is the sad part /
of being in a
community of believers, /
especially university students. /

= = = = = = = =

I want to share about a topic /
that gets very little attention in our
circles. /

This is a branch of study /
that was mainly taught /
in the monastic movements... /
among monks and nuns. /

[PRAY]

[Slide]

Struggle and Reward

The great spiritual writers in
Christian history /
speak of God in darkness. /

We typically think of God as Light. /
Jesus said /
"I am the Light of the world." /

And usually we think of darkness /
as "the kingdom of darkness." /

Yet when God appeared to the
Israelites /
at Mount Sinai... /

it was covered with heavy clouds, /
lightning and thunder. /

[Slide]

The text reads: /

The people remained at a distance /
while Moses approached the thick
darkness /

where God was. / Ex 20:21

[Slide]

And look at this verse: /

He made darkness His canopy /
all around Him... /

2 Sam 22:12

And there are many other texts... /
Nine times in the Psalms... /

David refers to God hiding His face
from David. /

Now we see through
a glass [**en enigmati**] in enigma.”

1 Cor 13:12

ἐν αἰνίγματι = “a riddle, enigma”

The spiritual writers say that this
"darkness" /

represents the mystery of God... /
Who is beyond our understanding. /

They taught that struggle /
is sometimes the very thing /
that allows us to "see" God more
clearly. /

Gregory of Nyssa, /
one of the Cappadocian Fathers
in the 4th century /

[Slide]

speaks of
"seeing that consists in not seeing" /
and he calls this a
"bright darkness." /

From the 16th century /
John of the Cross shares about /
the "Dark Night of the Soul." /

God hides Himself from us... /

It is agony. /

It is terrible... /

Yet God is right there with us. /

And when you come out of the
darkness on the other side... /

you have more confidence that God
is with you...always. /

God gives us these times of
"darkness" /
sometimes called a spiritual desert /
to urge our soul to LONG
for His presence again. /

To be desperate for His touch /

The darkness I am describing for a
Christian is most commonly felt /
when a spouse dies... /

or as Dr. Dimetrov shared... /

When a parent dies... /

probably the worst /
is to lose a child suddenly... /
something I hate to even imagine. /

This darkness comes /
because we do not understand... /
WHY? /

"God why are you allowing this?"
something very unpleasant to
happen...in our lives. /

But we will all go through this
darkness...at some point, /
God will take us through, /

"the valley of the [dark] shadow of death."

BUT David says,

[Slide]

"I will fear no evil, /
for You are with me..." /

[7 min]

And I surrendered to Christ in 1976. /

I was "all out" for God from day 1 /

I have never fallen away.... /

in almost 50 years. /

I dropped out of university, /

and went with YWAM to Argentina
for almost a year. /

After I returned to the US /
I was asked to lead **Students
for Christ** at the local Univ. /

Then I married Heather... /
went through a one year internship /

Then we planted a ministry at the
Univ of Alabama. /

We were there for 11 years. /

We grew the ministry to over 100
students... /

And had around 30 students that
went into missions...and ministry /

In the mid 90's I felt the Lord pulling
me into academics. /

I had a strong feeling that I was
supposed to get a PhD /
in the study of the Early Christian
fathers... /
and teach in a seminary. /

So I started down that path... /
It is too long of a story to tell, /
but God miraculously led us /
to St Andrews Univ in Scotland. /

In 1997 we were boxing up all of our
stuff... /

I found my old spiritual journals. /

I flipped through one of them from
1983... /

14 years earlier... /

At a training session... /

we were encouraged to pray and
write out a 10 year plan... /

for what we thought God was
leading us to do. /

I was stunned to read in my own
handwriting... /

my 10 year plan: /

- study Greek /

- do a PhD in Early Church History /

- teach in a university or seminary /

I had forgotten that moment. /

I cannot go into detail... /

But my darkness would

really begin /

once I finished my PhD. /

We moved in with my parents /

while I applied for teaching jobs /

Around 8 months /
and just over 130 schools later... /
I gave up. /

After around 20 phone interviews... /
I was short-listed around 8 times... /
8 times it came down to me and 1-2
others... /

At least 3 times I was the ONLY
person being considered... /

Several schools passed me by /
when they found out that I was
a charismatic/pentecostal.... /

And Darkness came my way... /

And it was not easy... /

And it was not fun. /

I had no job...for around a 6 months /

I finally landed a job at a software
company... /

hired by one of my former students./

Making more money than I ever
dreamed...AND I was miserable. /

Well, I found myself not doing
ministry for 15 years...AND I hated it.

[13 min]

This message is for any of you who
have walked through darkness. /

When you find yourself in darkness,
Unless you KNOW sin took you
there - you are NOT being punished.

This kind of darkness is not
something we can figure out. /

God has you there for a reason. /
For some of you, hearing this
message is preparation... /
for when you meet this spiritual
darkness. /

You will remember parts of this message to HELP you. /

Jesus said, "In this world you WILL have trials and tribulations... /

Have courage, for I have overcome the world." /

But when you are in this place... /
It's just not that easy. /

So I want to give you a few things to hide in your heart... /

I want to ask all of you to close your eyes. /

How many of you: /

Have faced this despair before? /

Are you in that place right now? /

THIS is for you...right now. /

1. God IS with you.

Believe me, I know it's not easy.

But He is with you.

He is not punishing you...

He is not angry with you...

Even IF it is discipline, it is not anger.

2. Be faithful. /

Do what is right in front of you. /

When I struggle like this: /

I am tempted to sit in self-pity... /

And do nothing. /

Be courageous... /

do what you KNOW you are
supposed to be doing.

And try to have a good attitude. /

That is the hardest thing for me. /

It's internal - nobody else sees it. /

But it's not good for ME... /

3. Keep asking God for help.

If you have a friend in this condition /
learn how to listen /
and be empathic. /

4. Hold on. It will come to an end. /
You cannot make it stop. /
You cannot pray enough.../
You cannot fast enough... /
And hold on....

The Darkness WILL come to an End
[min]

After 25 years of waiting... /
and struggling... /

God has opened this door for me. /

It felt like it came out of nowhere. /

And I realize that I HAVE been
graced by God this whole time. /

AND I am grateful. /

Looking back... /

it always makes sense. /

AND I realize what I always knew... /

God was with me the entire time. /

THAT...is the reward... /

Getting to teach is NOT my reward. /

Knowing God is with Me.

[PRAYER - Anyone struggling with
darkness...I want to pray for you...]