Notes from Night One – Redemptive Suffering – Deacon Art Miller

What Spiritual Suffering Is and How It Shows Up in Us

"Spiritual suffering isn't caused by God's absence — it's caused by the *felt experience* of His silence, His hiddenness, or His delay. It puts direct pressure on four things: our faith, our trust, our surrender, and our prayer.

Here's how it often shows up in a person. See if you recognize any of these tonight:

- Dryness or flatness in prayer — words that feel like they 'hit the ceiling'
- A sense of divine silence or abandonment, even while you still believe God exists
- Doubt about God's goodness when reality contradicts what you hoped for or prayed for
- Difficulty surrendering — wanting an explanation from God before you'll trust Him again
- Spiritual numbness toward practices that used to bring you comfort — prayer, worship, Scripture
- Anger, bargaining, or guilt for struggling — 'I shouldn't feel this way if my faith is real'
- A crisis of meaning or vocation — questioning your purpose in the middle of the pain
- And, paradoxically, a season where your faith may actually be deepening invisibly, even though it feels like the opposite

Here's the good news: none of this means your faith has failed. Look at Job. He lost his children, his health, and his wealth in a matter of days, and in the middle of that devastation, he said:

"Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face." — Job 13:15 (NIV)

That's not blind optimism — that's defiant trust, faith that keeps speaking to God even when it has every reason to walk away.

The psalmist does something just as important — he complains directly to God, and Scripture keeps the complaint as prayer, not as failure:

"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? … But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation." — Psalm 13:1, 5 (NIV)

Habakkuk names every loss in plain language, and chooses worship anyway:

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines… yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." — Habakkuk 3:17–18 (NIV)

And Scripture defines faith itself not as certainty, but as this kind of trust:

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." — Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Spiritual suffering is the arena where that kind of faith gets forged — not felt, chosen, sometimes daily, sometimes minute by minute."

Reflection Pause #1 (Silent, Individual)

"Let's pause. I'll read two questions. You can journal, or simply sit with them in silence — whatever helps you be honest. We'll hold a few minutes of quiet together."

Ask yourself:

1. *Which of the ways spiritual suffering 'shows up' did I just hear myself in — dryness, silence, doubt, numbness, anger, or something else?*
2. *Have I been judging myself for feeling this way, as if it means my faith isn't real?*

Teaching Part 2 — Surrender, Prayer, God's Hidden Work, and Moving Through with Hope

"If trust is what we hold onto in spiritual suffering, surrender is what we release. In the garden of Gethsemane, facing the most agonizing night of His life, Jesus modeled this perfectly:

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." — Matthew 26:39 (NIV)

Surrender is not resignation, and it's not numbness. It's bringing our honest desire to God *and* laying down our demand that He grant it on our terms.

This is also where prayer changes shape. Paul reminds us that when we don't even have words, the Spirit prays for us:

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans… And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." — Romans 8:26, 28 (NIV)

And sometimes God's work is simply hidden from us — not absent, just unseen:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways… As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways." — Isaiah 55:8–9 (NIV)

Paul himself begged three times for his 'thorn in the flesh' to be removed. God's answer wasn't removal — it was presence:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness… For when I am weak, then I am strong." — 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 (NIV)

So how do we actually move through this season with hope and faith, rather than shame or despair? Scripture doesn't offer a shortcut — it offers a process:

"We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." — Romans 5:3–5 (NIV)

That's echoed again here:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." — James 1:2–3 (NIV)

"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith — of greater worth than gold — may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." — 1 Peter 1:6–7 (NIV)

And hope isn't passive waiting — it's active trust:

"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." — Psalm 27:13–14 (NIV)

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." — Romans 15:13 (NIV)

Put simply: move through spiritual suffering by staying honest instead of performing certainty; by letting go of demanding an explanation before you trust; by expecting the process rather than a shortcut; by remembering God's ways are hidden, not absent; and by anchoring your hope in who God is, not in whether this situation resolves the way you want."