

HONEST IN THE DARK : Fighting for Joy Without Faking It



Honest in the Dark

Fighting for joy without faking it

The Honest Kingdom Voice™

R.D. SULLIVAN

HONEST IN THE DARK

Fighting for Joy Without Faking It

Doing What We Can While We Wait for God—and Joy

Dr. RD SULLY Sullivan, PsyD, ThD, DMin

The Honest Kingdom Voice™

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*“I waited patiently for the LORD; and
he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.”*

— Psalm 40:1 (KJV)

*“Weeping may endure for a night, but
joy cometh in the morning.”*

— Psalm 30:5 (KJV)

*“For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my
God will enlighten my darkness.”*

— Psalm 18:28 (KJV)

DEDICATED TO

*the memory of my Ministry Mentor and Spiritual Father of the
Gospel,*

**International Bishop Chaplain Stephen N.
Short, M.Div., D.D.**

1941 — 2011

*Founder of the William J. Seymour Pentecostal Fellowship
International*

*Who wakened hope for many in the darkness of
perfectionistic despair.*

*Who showed me that a man can be full of joy and full of
honesty at the same time.*

Who never once told me to fake it.

Who loved me through dark seasons I could not yet name.

*Bishop Short — you lit a candle in my darkness before I knew
I was in one.*

This book is yours.

*“The secret of spiritual success is a hunger
that persists...It is an awful condition to be
satisfied with one’s spiritual
attainments...God was and is looking for
hungry, thirsty people.”*

— Smith Wigglesworth

*“I don’t often spend more than half an hour
in prayer at one time, but I never go more
than half an hour without praying.”*

— William J. Seymour

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Scripture quotations marked KJV are from The Holy Bible,

Who I Am and Why I Wrote This

I need to tell you who I am before I tell you what I believe.
Not the bio version. Not the credential list. The real version.

I am RD Sullivan — most people know me as Sully. I was born in 1976 to a minister and a housewife. Military family. Church family. From the time I was three years old, people said I had healing hands. That I would throw tantrums because

a name would surface in my mind and I needed to go pray for that person. That I went to hospitals and people walked out healed.

That sounds like a gift. And it was. But gifts given to children before children know who they are — before anyone teaches them how to carry what they carry — become burdens. I got tired of being called on for what I could do. I got tired of being the boy with healing hands. So I stopped wanting it.

I have dyslexia. My mother used to push me hard until I read correctly. I would read the same passage five times before I

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could get through it. Eventually it worked — I started reading three to five books a week. But what also grew from that season was a voice in my head that said I always had something to say — and not as a compliment. As a command to disappear. To make myself smaller in rooms where my presence was too much.

I carried that voice for decades.

At thirteen, my grandfather died in his room. My mother was asleep. My father had not been in the house since the divorce — a divorce I had engineered at ten years old by choosing to stay with my mother because I knew that whoever kept the child kept the house, and my mother had no job and nowhere to go. A ten-year-old boy sacrificed his own need for his father to save his mother from being homeless.

Nobody taught me that was winning. I just did it. Because the man had left and I was the next male in the house.

I washed my grandfather's body that night. Alone. Remade the bed with white linen. Learned to turn off emotion to function. Because someone had to and there was no one else.

That is where I learned to move in the dark.

I have been divorced. I have been institutionalized. I have attempted to end my life forty-two times. I have sat in a

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holding cell in December 2019 — a man with doctoral degrees and a word from God — and had a stranger ask me to pray. And I prayed. Because the call does not go away even when you want it to.

I have three earned doctorates and a felony record. I have a platform and scars. I have a word from God and a diagnosis. I have been consecrated and broken and rebuilt and broken again.

And I am still here.

Not because I was strong enough. Because He was faithful enough.

That is who I am. And that is why I wrote this.

This book is not theory. It is testimony. It is the honest account of a man who fought for joy in the dark — lost the fight more than once, kept getting up, and eventually found solid ground.

I am writing it so you can find it faster than I did.

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INTRODUCTION

More Than Feelings — The Real Fight for Joy

*“These things have I spoken unto you, that my
joy might remain in you, and that your joy might
be full.”*

— John 15:11 (KJV)

UVSB: *“I’m telling you this so that the joy I carry gets*

planted in you — and grows until it fills you all the way up.”

I performed wholeness while bleeding out for years. That is not a metaphor. That is my biography.

I stood behind pulpits, counseled broken people, laid hands on the sick, built platforms, trained leaders — and not one person in those rooms knew that the man doing all of it was running on empty. Not one person checked. Not one person asked. Because I was performing it so well that there was nothing to check on. The sermon was tight. The presence was strong. The

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word was accurate. And inside the man delivering all of it was a fracture that had never been named.

I am not telling you this for sympathy.

I am telling you this because you may be the same person.

You may be sitting with this book right now in the middle of your own performance — holding it together for everyone around you, functioning in your assignment, moving in your gifts — and dying quietly in a place nobody has clearance to enter. And the lie you are living inside says that the darkness you are experiencing is evidence of something wrong with you. That a person with your calling, your history with God,

your years in the Word should not feel this way.

That lie is what this book dismantles.

What Darkness Actually Means

The presence of darkness in your life does not indicate the absence of God in your life.

Read that again. Out loud if you have to.

Darkness comes to genuinely saved, genuinely Spirit-filled, genuinely committed believers. Not sometimes. Regularly. Throughout the entire history of the people of God — from the

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Psalms of David to the letters of Paul — the experience of spiritual darkness has been a documented reality for people who walked closely with God.

■ THE HONEST KINGDOM LENS

A significant strand of contemporary charismatic and Pentecostal culture has built a performance framework around joy — one in which your emotional state is treated as the primary evidence of your spiritual condition. If you are happy, you are in faith. If you are struggling, something is wrong with you.

I know this framework intimately. I lived inside it for decades. I preached it. And I watched it wound people who deserved better.

The result is a congregation of people who perform joy they do not feel because they are terrified of what their darkness says about them. Concealed darkness does not heal. It festers. If it doesn't make sense — make change.

The Ground You Stand On

The ground is this: God's acceptance of you is a legal verdict, not an emotional transaction.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

— Romans 5:1 (KJV)

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UVSB: *“So since God has cleared our record through faith, we've got real peace with Him — and that's all because of what Jesus did.”*

The Greek word *dikaioo* — to declare righteous. Forensic language. Courtroom language. A permanent irrevocable verdict based not on your performance but on His. It does not fluctuate with your emotional state.

I am justified. I am righteous in Christ. The

verdict of heaven over my life is not based on how I feel today. It is based on what Jesus did two thousand years ago. That verdict stands.

I call this gutsy guilt — the ability to come to God as you are, in the dark, without pretense, knowing that your guilt does not disqualify you because His righteousness has already covered it.

FIGHT QUESTIONS — FOR INDIVIDUAL USE

- *What lie has the darkness been telling you about your standing with God?*
- *Can you articulate in your own words what justification means for your specific situation right now?*
- *Write one truth about your identity in Christ and speak it out loud today — regardless of how you feel.*

FOR GROUP USE

- *How has your church community handled the subject of spiritual darkness? Has it been addressed honestly?*
- *What would it look like to create space for people to be honest about dark seasons without spiritual judgment?*

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CHAPTER ONE

Real Darkness,

Real Saints

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

— Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

UVSB: *“Even when I’m walking through the darkest stretch — the kind of darkness that feels like death is close — I’m not shaking, because You’re right here with me. Your authority and Your guidance are what keep me steady.”*

December 2019.

A man sits in a holding cell.

Not a criminal. A man with doctoral degrees and a word from God — sitting in a holding cell on a cold December night with nowhere to go and nothing left to perform.

That man was me.

I am not going to tell you everything that led to that cell. What I will tell you is this: by the time December 2019 arrived, I had forty-two attempts behind me. I had a marriage that was fracturing. I had a church that had already decided I was taking too long to get myself together. I had watched the

people who were supposed to be the field hospital become the second wound. And I had been running — from the darkness, from the pain, from the version of myself that kept showing up no matter how fast I moved — for longer than I could remember.

And in that holding cell on that December night, a stranger looked at me and asked me to pray.

I prayed.

Not because I felt like it. Not because I was in a good place spiritually. Not because I had manufactured the presence of God from somewhere inside the rubble of what I was.

*I prayed because the call does not go away
even when you want it to.*

The Question Nobody Asks Out Loud

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Can a Spirit-filled, genuinely saved, tongue-talking, God-fearing, consecrated, Word-believing Christian experience prolonged seasons of spiritual darkness?

Yes.

Not as a theological concession. As documented biblical reality.

“How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?”

— Psalm 13:1-2 (KJV)

UVSB: *“God — how long are You going to act like I’m not here? Seriously — how long? I’m dealing with this alone in my head, grieving every single day, while the people against me are winning. How long is this going to go on?”*

This is not the prayer of an unbeliever. This is the prayer of the anointed king — the worshiper, the psalmist — writing from inside a real dark season and refusing to dress it up. God did not rebuke him for the honesty. God preserved it in the canon.

Elijah knew this darkness. Fresh off the fire falling on Mount Carmel, he sat under a juniper tree and asked God to take his life. God’s response was not rebuke. Not a sermon on weak

faith. God let him sleep. Provided food. Said: “Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee” (1 Kings 19:7, KJV).

The church makes two consistent errors around spiritual darkness and both cause damage.

Error One is the Accusation Error — the assumption that prolonged darkness is always evidence of specific sin. This is the theology of Job’s friends. God rebuked them for it explicitly.

Error Two is the Passivity Error — the spiritual fatalism that calls darkness God’s will and offers nothing practical. Simply wait. Simply trust. No tools. No strategy.

Truth navigates between both errors. You are called to active, informed, faith-filled engagement.

The Physical Side of Darkness

Your body affects your spiritual experience.

I hold a doctorate in psychology. The relationship between your physical condition and your capacity to experience spiritual joy is real, documented, and significant. When the body is depleted — through illness, trauma, hormonal disruption, or exhaustion — the soul’s ability to register the felt presence of God is genuinely diminished.

This is your permission — pastoral, biblical, and clinical — to take your physical health seriously. If you are in prolonged darkness, see a physician. Pursue counseling. If a doctor

determines medication is appropriate, use it without shame. There is no spiritual virtue in refusing medical help for a medical condition.

You Are Still a Saint

Wherever your darkness is coming from — sin, warfare, physical condition, trauma, grief, or a combination — you are still a saint. The seed of God is in you. The darkness does not uproot it. You are in a valley. There is another side.

FIGHT QUESTIONS — FOR INDIVIDUAL USE

- *Which error — accusation or passivity — have you defaulted to in your dark season?*
- *What physical factors might be contributing to your spiritual experience right now?*
- *What does it mean to you that David's honest prayers are preserved in the Bible?*

FOR GROUP USE

- *How does your community handle the intersection of mental and physical health with spiritual wellbeing?*
- *What would it look like to create a culture where people can acknowledge dark seasons without spiritual stigma?*