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The Quest

"It's a curious thing about quests, isn't it, Mr. Quirk?" she said. "The seeker embarks on a journey to find what he wants and discovers, along the way, what he needs."

I put the novel down.

It was one of those moments when I realized that something significant was about to happen, if I'd pause long enough to let it. If I would stop long enough to get the impact of the words.

The words tumbled within me. I felt drawn to them; to ponder them; to absorb more than their surface meaning.

The paradox of it struck me. Yes, how often do I, do we all actually, pursue something we want only to find that what we really need is quite different indeed? But somehow we are unable to find it without the journey itself which often proves rocky, curvy, dangerous, and on a surface glance, absolutely undesirable.

We have a goal, a desire, a drive. We aim at it. We head toward it, often in the only way we know how, but somehow, almost mystically along the journey, its pull on our hearts disappears. We find, in a way that looks to be accidental, what our hearts really needed.

How can it be that when we find ourselves in the darkest situations, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley..."* where the shadows are all around us, *"of the shadow of death..."*, and we initially feel our goal is just to get out of this awful place, that suddenly we can experience God along the way, *"I will fear no evil..."*, finding that He is with us? *"for He is with me."*

And it is in the walking through the valley that we change. Our situation may not change. Our problem may not go away. But we change.

We all know that we humans are not prone to change unless we have to. We love comfort. We love security. We love the "sameness" of our everyday lives. We like knowing what to expect, but sometimes...

Everything changes. We didn't ask for it. We hate it. We resist it. We scream at the darkness to no effect. We are in a dark valley. So we "decide" what we need. We head toward it with everything that is within us. We must get out of this seemingly god-forsaken place that we find ourselves in. But the darkness causes us to grope for something familiar to hold onto. We try to find our way without crashing into anything. How difficult it is to get through those valleys!

Yet how often is it that when the worst happens, the best shows up as well?

When I faced my darkest night, I found in my groping, friends who really cared. When I risked sharing my heart's scariest feelings, I found people who validated me. When I thought I wanted a quick passage out of the blackness, I found that those who cared would hold my hand and lead me when I couldn't see. When in the darkness, I tripped over the most familiar things, I found new paths to walk. When I wanted to scream at God, "Why have you forsaken me?", I found He had not. Forced in my brokenness to give up my reputation as a strong woman, I truly found an authentic strength in my utter weakness.

I've heard it said that the journey is as much ordained as the destination. In our goal-oriented way of life, it just seems a waste. If we could just go from A to Z and skip b, c, d, e, ... wouldn't it be better? But it is on the journey from A to Z that we learn about the other letters that we need to be able to spell words such as *hope*, *care*, and *grace*.

How many times have we listed our goals for a new day only to have those goals turned completely upside down and find ourselves in the midst of the most unexpected encounter that makes us pause in wonder at the mystery of life's journey? We find our best laid plans ruined only to discover that we can breathe deeply and truly find God was in the moment. The God in us in the unplanned, unexpected, initially undesired interruptions of life.

And we find what we really, really need on the journey to get what we want.

What we want loses its pull on our hearts as we realize what we deeply need is better, more fulfilling, more purposeful, more true.

It really is a curious thing about quests, isn't it?

Perhaps today some of us will be willing to look for the faint glimpse of light in the darkness that provides a key to joy; a key to a purposeful life; a key to what we really need. Perhaps we will discover that it is not what we thought at all. Maybe, just maybe, we will find God in the quest and find the joy of discovering what we need on the journey.

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