It was 4:30am and I sat in my dark bedroom sipping my first cup of coffee. I glanced out my window to see a dark sky punctuated by occasional glimpses of stars. I don’t know why, but seeing stars has always comforted me. I turned on my bedroom light to make my way to the coffee pot for a refill and returned to the bedroom chair. I turned off the light and was disappointed. The stars were gone. Moments later I looked again and there they were, so small and slight and ever so faint at times, but most certainly there. I was relieved to see them and strained to watch them for quite some time. Once my eyes adjusted to the dark, it was touching and significant in me to see those little glimpses of light reappear on that early morning.

Seeing and recognizing tiny glimpses of light as we journey in grief give us encouragement and hope that, indeed, we’ll make it – we’ll survive – we might even eventually thrive. Often though, in the early throes of grief, it’s almost impossible for us to see any light at all. We may even be offended by the idea that there are glimpses of light. In fact, often one of our greatest fears is that we are forever condemned to see and feel nothing but darkness for the rest of our lives. Although this perception feels real right now, there are literally millions of people who have traveled this journey and can attest to seeing light again. Of course, darkness didn’t turn to light all at once, nor was it the same kind of light as before, but periodically they caught glimpses of light along the way, until one day life was purposeful and meaningful again. What they discovered, as will you, is that our eyes, more accurately our hearts and souls and minds, need to be able to adjust to the dark before we can notice glimpses of light. Some of the adjustment happens naturally, but most of the adjustment takes work, intention, effort and patience.

How can we help ourselves adjust to the darkness? Perhaps first by befriending the dark – by choosing not to resist or run away from it. To be with, acknowledge and allow those painful, sometimes surprising and scary, dark emotions to surface - to feel them and to find healthy ways to release them. Often, to fully release dark emotions in us they need to be witnessed and honored by others. Which leads to a second way for us to adjust to the dark: connect with others who “get it” and “get us.” This might be a trusted friend, family member, coworker, or minister. It might be a counselor or a support group or a gathering of the bereaved. To our great surprise, it just might be a complete stranger. But for certain, a sure way to stay in the dark, to never see glimpses of light, is to try and walk this journey alone – to “buck up” and “be strong” – to not need anyone – to keep to ourselves – to concentrate on taking care of others so we don’t have to be in our pain.

Here are several more ways we can help our hearts, souls and minds adjust to the dark:

- **Offer ourselves** gentleness, tenderness, patience and time – acknowledging the steps we have taken vs judging and comparing them to others and the unrealistic expectations we may place on ourselves.

- **Find physical and active ways** to express our grief and honor our loved one: journal writing, gardening, telling stories, cooking and baking our loved one’s favorite food and sharing what we create with others, creating a memorial – perhaps a scholarship fund or planning a golf outing or a plaque in the backyard, building a birdhouse, creating a piece of art, etc.

- **Ask for help** – perhaps you need someone to mow the lawn, help you with finances, run errands, or cook a meal or two. Be specific.

- **Admit to and be honest** about life as it is in this moment – the reality of your life now, choosing
not to try to recapture what was and can never be again. Perhaps this means changing some family traditions and customs for a season or two, letting go of an annual outing with friends, sitting in a different space at church, or fill in the blank ____________. This may mean coming to an acceptance of who you are becoming and how you’re changing.

These ideas are limiting. There are so many other ways. Our minds, hearts and souls intuitively know and voice what we need so we can adjust to the dark. You and I just need to listen, trust and honor our selves.

So, here’s the thing; it’s precisely in our efforts and our intentions to adjust to the darkness that we catch glimpses of light. Yep, we can’t see any pieces of light until we allow ourselves to be in the dark. This little light might be found in an understanding heart, a comforting shoulder to cry on, or a non-judgmental ear. It might be found in a favor done without being asked or an author whose book affirmed what we’re feeling and experiencing as normal. It might be in a dear pet, who never, ever leaves our side and always accepts us no matter our mood. It might be taking notice of a tulip pushing its way through the ground or hearing a never before heard complimentary story about our loved one. It might be discovering that we can do something we never thought possible or sensing the presence of the Divine in an intimate way.

These glimpses of light are unquestionably glimpses of hope and are necessary to heal, but will only be noticed if we’re willing to befriend the dark. May you find the courage to remain in the dark allowing your mind, heart and soul to adjust, and may you find comfort and consolation in noticing glimpses of light along your way.