

## INTRODUCTION

Pain is one of life's most debilitating, depressing, and dark sensations. Chronic pain, relentless and ongoing, can make life seem almost unbearable. And when treatments aimed at alleviating pain do not work (or stop working), we can be plunged even deeper into a terrible place where the future seems more than bleak—it seems impossible.

Pain can wrench us away from everything we love—people, activities, even God.

Yes, it *can* wrench us away...*if* we let it.

At various times in my life, pain has stopped me in my tracks, isolated me from others, and made me wonder if a better day would ever come. Whether because of accidents (a hard suitcase falling on my head from an overhead compartment on an airplane, for example) or illness (lupus, knee osteoarthritis, scoliosis, and pleurisy, for example), pain has been a constant companion in my childhood and adult years—and I've now come to realize that it probably won't go away anytime soon.

That realization—that pain is always there—is not easy to accept. Who among us looks forward to day after day of feeling awful, not being able to move well, or, worse, not being able to move at all? Who relishes endless pain-racked nights or days of feeling like the world is racing by, leaving us stranded and alone?

Who wants to acknowledge that the lives God gives us are less than ideal?

As we chafe against the binding power of pain, we look to doctors for medications, to other people for sympathy, to God for relief. Some of us venture into perilous waters, experimenting with dangerous habits that inevitably lead to hopeless complications and even more pain.

We, in our humanness, cry to God for pity. We bargain (“I’ll be a better person if you’ll cure me of my pain”). We rail (“If you are bringing me such torment, then I don’t believe in your love anymore”). We plead (“Please, Lord, take this pain away”). We put forth our case to God (“I’ve lived a good life. Why do you do this to me?”) and expect an immediate reply.

We want to be happy—and pain-free. Only then, we may think, will life move ahead. Only then will we be capable of feeling joy.

It’s only natural. When we are children, we recoil from things that can bring us pain. A sharp needle. A snarling dog. A hot stovetop.

We take our child-learned instincts to avoid pain and rely on them to shield us from harm as adults. We throw out food that has spoiled. We wait for traffic to clear before entering an intersection. We wear protective clothing against thorny, bristly growth in our gardens.

If we take such measures to protect ourselves from external threats, it’s no wonder that we don’t want the pain that resides inside our bodies.

Yes, we don’t want it.

But it still is.

There isn’t a person alive who will sail through his or her time on earth without physical or emotional pain or both. Some people will have more of it. Some will have it for a longer period of time. But all will have pain.

That’s part of being human, too.

So, given that pain will be with us in some form from the beginning of our lives to the end, what do we really do about it?

Or, more to the point, how do we see beyond pain and allow our lives to sing with hope, faith, love, yes, and joy?

For more than a decade, I’ve been involved with patient advocacy and have met scores of wonderful people who live vibrant lives while experiencing harsh, painful physical challenges. These women, men, and children are not all gifted with incredible talent, nor are they all wealthy, highly educated, or socially secure. But each is

an example of what someone can do when pain would be otherwise debilitating.

These shining lights have taught me so very much!

In this book, I hope to pass along what I and my fellow sufferers have learned about living beyond pain, shaping lives that are positive, productive, and potent with promise and faith.

This is not a book about curing pain. Each individual needs to consult with appropriate, competent medical professionals about diagnosing, monitoring, and treating pain and its causes.

This book is about what people in pain can do to contribute to the world around them, nurture love in themselves and others, and know their worth—great as it is—as precious members of God’s grace-filled world.

This book is also about tying in our current suffering with faith, and seeing the holiness in our health challenges. It is a book about taking our life experience and bringing it into our communities in a very active, positive manner so that all may know greater compassion, respect, and appreciation for the pure gift of life.

Finally, this is a book based on two remarkable, pain-filled lives from Scripture: Job and Jesus.

## **Why Job?**

As a newly diagnosed lupus patient, I was particularly drawn to the story of Job, the upright man whose life fell apart seemingly all at once. Job’s losses parallel the losses that I and many people with pain experience, especially the lost connections with friends and loved ones who do not understand the place of suffering in life.

Indeed, with pain comes loss. First, there is loss of health. Then, there can be loss of movement, activity, employment, and position in society. Friends can stop calling. Family members can become impatient when the pain lingers day after day.