

Introduction

Recently I was diagnosed with polymyositis, a rare disease where the autoimmune system begins to attack and destroy healthy cells in the body. Its symptoms include painful swelling, general muscle weakness, and chronic fatigue. There is no known cause for polymyositis and no cure. Twenty percent of the people who get it die within five years. Others are able to manage the disease through medication.

About the same time I learned I had this chronic illness, I had just written a book entitled *When the Rain Speaks: Celebrating God's Presence in Nature*. When a friend learned of my illness, she said, "Melannie, you should write a book called *When the Pain Speaks*." This is that book.

Millions of us experience pain in our lives, whether it is physical, mental, or emotional. At times our pain is minor: a sore muscle, worry over rising prices, a disagreement with a friend. Other times our pain is major: crippling arthritis, looming financial disaster, the severing of a cherished relationship. No matter its form or intensity, pain interrupts our life. It takes us aback. It forces us to ask questions like: Why did this happen to me? Did I do some-

thing bad to deserve this? What should I do now? Where is God in all of this?

This book provides help for people dealing with pain—any kind of pain. It offers thirty-six meditations on various aspects of pain and suffering. Rooted in our Christian faith, the chapters explore topics such as: the universality of pain, pain as wise advisor, Jesus the healer, dealing with setbacks, befriending the imperfect, pain and laughter, the suffering of the saints, biblical images of suffering, and death and resurrection. Each chapter begins with an engaging quotation from a wide variety of sources. The quotation is followed by a meditation on the topic and an appropriate prayer. Each chapter concludes with a question or two for personal reflection as well as a suggested action for the day.

That great Christian writer C.S. Lewis once said, “God speaks to us in our joy; God shouts to us in our pain.” I tend to agree with him although perhaps he exaggerated the volume of God’s voice. The Jewish writer Martin Buber said that God addresses us continuously via a silent presence that infuses all of creation. Buber referred to this unique communication of God as “silent thunders.” The truth is, sometimes God shouts to us in our pain, yes, but sometimes God whispers too or even thunders silently. But the fact remains, as we journey through life, God is speaking to us always—in our sorrows and joys, disappointments and successes, our fears and hopes. And yes, God speaks to us in our pain in a special way. It is my hope that this book will be a helpful guide for your listening.