

Answered Prayer

Mary-Ann Coetzee

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In *Answered Prayer*, Mary-Anne Coetzee shares stories of how God has answered her prayers, and tells of the struggles she faced and the knowledge she gained in the process.

Coetzee has an unshakably strong faith in God. The book itself was a result of prayer: she had a desire to write it and prayed that God would make it clear whether she should. The next Sunday her pastor supposedly told her in the middle of his sermon, “God said He will bless your book.”

The author’s life story is powerful from the very start. Coetzee’s mother had been “shocked and humiliated” when she got pregnant and tried to have an abortion. This set the tone for Coetzee’s life, and she writes, “My first fight for survival was at three months in my mother’s womb.” Her goal here is to prove that “God does exist,” but many readers—believers and nonbelievers alike—will find that Coetzee’s evidence of God’s provision (such as a mysterious message by fax) does not relate to the realities of their own daily lives.

The bulk of the book focuses on the author’s fight with lupus. Coetzee discusses her diagnosis and the overall symptoms and treatment of the disease as well as her day-to-day struggles and emotional challenges. She even includes talk of the dietary supplements that are useful to help the body heal from various conditions. Because of this, the volume is much more medically focused than the title suggests, and the writing more sterile and textbook-like than one would expect in a memoir.

The book includes a number of tables and figures to illustrate points; most are focused on diseases and supplements. One diagram that is key to Coetzee’s perspective shows the words “Faith,” “Cleanse the Soul,” and “Exercise” at three corners of a triangle, each connected by actions/beliefs that readers can apply. In the center of the triangle, and connected to each corner by actions/beliefs, is Nutrition. This holistic approach to faith and health characterizes the book but is not fully represented by the title.

Coetzee’s chapter on healing supplements discusses Dr. Johanna Budwig’s supposedly cancer-curing recipe. While readers will agree that supplements and nutrients are beneficial to the body, some may be skeptical of Coetzee’s sweeping claims about their curative powers, especially given that Budwig’s cure is controversial. The author would likely attribute any unbelievability of her claims to the power of prayer working through natural means, but readers will be left to decide for themselves whether her testimony rings true.

MELISSA WUSKE (January 14, 2013)

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