

**WHO'S IN
CHARGE**
of a
**WORLD
THAT
SUFFERS?**

TRUSTING GOD IN
DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

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INTRODUCTION

Who is in charge of a world that suffers? Social media scrambles to answer the question but falls short. News anchors throw their hands up without response. Chaos prevails, conspiracy theories rage, turmoil spins like a killing twister, deception wreaks havoc, and many people believe there is no one who has a remedy.

People who once scoffed at the notion that the world was heading toward a cataclysmic event perhaps now listen more intently to the prediction that life as we know it will one day come to an end.

From the beginning of time, society has searched for happiness and hope for a better tomorrow only to have fear and anxiety bring the human race to its knees.

Nervousness, stress, and overwhelming reality prevent sleep, slow productivity, threaten livelihoods, and crush the human spirit.

History is replete with personal sorrows, dashed hopes, sickness, death, despair, addiction, failed relationships, abusive behavior, terrorism, persecution, wrongful accusations, political turmoil, and loss of freedom. To further complicate human suffering, a worldwide pandemic prowls the world, closing national borders, halting travel, separating loved ones, canceling funerals and graduations, closing churches, and

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utterly confusing right and wrong. There is no question that COVID-19 has infiltrated our way of life, turning human emotions into sheer panic with the chilling thought that the new normal will be a lasting nightmare. Others escape into daydreams hoping that when they snap back to reality, they will discover with joy that it was a fleeting horror.

How do you view the present days in which we live? What words come to mind when you hear the buzzwords of our day?

Crisis **O**ppression **V**iolence **I**nfections **D**isease

My father wrote a book forty years ago that addresses these issues, originally titled *Till Armageddon: A Perspective on Suffering*, raising the question: Who is in charge of a world that suffers? The answer comes from God's Word.

Christ **O**vercomes—**V**ictory **I**s **D**one

You see, suffering is no surprise to the Lord. Jesus warned that we would face uncertainty, persecution, and trouble of every kind. He Himself suffered for us, and we will also face trials and sorrow as Scripture tells us. But the Lord never gives warning without a promise.

“These things I have spoken to you . . . In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

(JOHN 16:33 NKJV)

The apostle John wrote: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4–5 NKJV).

Are you an overcomer? Are you born of God? You are if you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. He has sent His

Holy Spirit to empower you as you journey through life with all of its pitfalls, with all of its strife, and with all of its fears and sorrows—and, yes, with persecutions to come.

In this book my father helps the reader traverse this journey called life by pointing to the One who guides us by His mighty Spirit, helping us walk with Him in certain victory. He describes the biblical account of a cataclysmic time to come known as the Battle of Armageddon where good and evil collide. My father sheds light on all that leads up to the truth that God has already won the battle and victory is ours. He does not sugarcoat the suffering that men and women endure—troubles that he refers to as “personal armageddons.” They are just a drop in the bucket compared to the magnitude of terror the world will face as Armageddon explodes onto the scene, causing travail and terror.

Armageddon means a catastrophic event. Those of us who trust in the God of the Bible—Creator of all things—need not fear Armageddon, nor should we fear “personal armageddons.” Sovereign God has a purpose in all things, and He does bring good out of trouble and light out of darkness.

The Bible says, “Light shall shine out of darkness . . . to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6 NASB).

God used Samaritan’s Purse to bring light in a time of great darkness. Our organization responded to COVID-19 in March 2020 by setting up a state-of-the-art, sixty-eight-bed field hospital in Central Park at the request of officials in New York City to administer critical care for patients stricken with coronavirus. Working in conjunction with Mount Sinai Hospital, we were welcomed warmly by New York citizens, many who came bearing food, hot coffee, smiles, and willing hearts to lend helping hands in the midst of the catastrophic pandemic that shut down the world. We turned no one away, and the Lord opened up opportunities for our doctors, nurses, technicians, staff, and chaplains (from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association) to bring comfort to the fevered brows and the lonely hearts of those suffering because of the “silent” virus—an

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unseen enemy—that gripped bodies and imaginations. This was done in the name of Jesus Christ, and we were thankful to be used to bring glory to His great name.

The apostle Paul wrote: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). This is what God enabled us to do, and each person can overcome evil with the good that comes from a gracious and loving God.

Whether we face “personal armageddons” or battles that jolt society, we do not have to succumb to fear; we don’t have to drown in sorrow. And we don’t have to fall victim to the evil that surrounds us.

The Bible says, “For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7 NKJV).

So, who is in charge of a world that is suffering? It is none other than Jesus Christ, who has overcome with His promise that as the end of time approaches, He will not forsake His people but will strengthen us in the hour of need.

As you read my father’s book, you will be blessed and encouraged as he points the way to Christ and all that embodies the One who covers us with His loving care.

We do not have to wait for victory. We can claim it now because His power is available every moment and every day.

“So we do not lose heart . . . for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

(2 COR. 4:16–18 ESV)

For those who have not committed their lives to Jesus Christ as Savior, today is the day of salvation. You can have the same assurance as those who have put their hope and trust in God’s Son, the Savior of the

world. There is no need to worry, there is no need to wrestle, and there is no need to wonder who is in charge of a world that is suffering. Look to Jesus Christ and live.

Franklin Graham

January 5, 2021

President and CEO

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

Samaritan's Purse

Boone, North Carolina

PREFACE

One of the oldest books in the world states, “Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7).

Never have these words been truer than today.

The whole world is sighing and suffering on a scale perhaps not known in human history: the refugees, the starving, the psychological woes, the emotional turmoil, the broken marriages, the rebellious children, the terrorism, the hostages, the wars, and a thousand other troubles which beset every country in the world. No one is immune. The rich and famous suffer as well as the poor and obscure. As the late actor Peter Sellers said, “Behind the mask of all us clowns is sadness and broken hearts.”

It seems that the human race may well be heading toward the climax of the tears, hurts, and wounds of the centuries—Armageddon! Biblically the word speaks of the coming of the last and final war—a cataclysmic event. Until that day, however, people everywhere suffer their own personal “armageddons,” happenings for which we are not usually prepared, and the suffering it brings is often catastrophic.

Suffering is the common lot of all people everywhere—believers and non-believers alike. But Christians often have their own particular types of sufferings in addition to the normal range of human miseries. Many times they suffer because they are followers of Jesus Christ. And many

times they cry out with the psalmist, “Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?” (Ps. 77:9).

It is an ancient cry—echoed today by millions of people around the world. Why is there evil? Where did it all start, and why does God allow the terrible nightmare of suffering and evil to continue in human history? Why do the prayers for the overthrow of wickedness and for the victory of justice and righteousness seemingly go unanswered? And why are Christians not exempt from suffering—including persecution?

These are not easy questions to answer, and in reality we will never know the answer completely until we see our Lord face to face in heaven. Nevertheless, the Bible does give us some answers, and in this book I have tried to see what the Bible offers us to this universal question—the question of suffering.

But this study of the subject of suffering is not an academic or intellectual exercise, attempting to answer abstract philosophical questions, which are unrelated to everyday living. No, as we shall see in these pages, even if we may not always understand why God allows certain things to happen to us, we *can* know He is able to bring good out of evil, and triumph out of suffering.

And so my concern in writing this book has been practical—to see what the Bible teaches us about suffering: how we should view it, and how we should prepare for it. What if you had just been notified you had six months to live because of incurable cancer? Or what if a loved one were suddenly stricken by a massive heart attack or critically injured in an automobile accident? What if you were taken hostage or cast into prison because of your faith in Christ? Or what about a thousand and one other personal crises—big and small—which could press upon us (or may already be pressing upon you right now)? How should you prepare for tragedy, or sorrow, or suffering, whatever its nature or source may be? How can you prepare *now* for the personal armageddons of the future—the battles we all face which threaten to overwhelm us? And how can you prepare for the great future Armageddon, which will mark the climax of world suffering and the ultimate overthrow of evil?

These questions are of critical importance for each one of us.

Mount Everest was never climbed in a day. Those who attempt to climb its treacherous slopes spend months, even years, in training and in practice. Each small mountain conquered prepares one for a higher mountain and a tougher climb ahead.

So, too, the best preparation for tough times ahead are the little daily difficulties and how we react to them.

But my concern has also been to show another dimension of the Bible's teaching about suffering—the dimension of hope. Someday all the pain and suffering of this world will be gloriously banished. Because of what Jesus Christ did for us through His cross and resurrection, we know that we have hope for the future. We know that in heaven every sin and evil will be banished, and suffering will be no more. The apostle Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18–21).

From Scripture I hope to show something of what the future life is going to be like. In so doing we are going to see how the glory that lies ahead is far greater than any sufferings we might endure here.

But in the meantime, we are called to learn what it means to trust God in every circumstance, and to live for Him no matter what comes our way. My prayer is that God will use this book to help us think more clearly about suffering, and to rearrange our priorities so that when Armageddon comes—or our personal armageddons come—we will not be taken by surprise or be unprepared. Like Joseph storing up grain during the years of plenty to be used during the years of famine that lay ahead, may we store up the truths of God's Word in our hearts as much as possible, so that we are prepared for whatever suffering we are called upon to endure.

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As an army officer once said, “Weather in war is always favorable if you know how to use it.”

May this book help us to learn how to “use the weather,” whatever it may be.

I have written this book, I must admit, with much reluctance. There are many, many others who have been through fires of suffering much more severe than those I have known, and as a result, they have experienced the grace and strength of God in far deeper measure. And yet God has been teaching me much about this subject—through personal experience, through the lives of others, and supremely through the Bible, His Word. I pray that through this book God will bring hope and encouragement to you—and challenge as well—as He has brought these to me during the writing of it.

Many times in the midst of the troubles and difficulties of my own life two little words have stood out, “Fear Not.” I have often called those two little words the divine hush for God’s children. But I have found that faith must lay hold of Christ, and we must live in godly fear. As the little child when hushed to sleep nestles on the mother’s bosom, God’s children need the calming, the “fear not” of the Scriptures in these days of fear and trembling. He still speaks to us as He spoke to Abraham, “Do not be afraid . . . I am your shield, your very great reward” (Gen. 15:1); and to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Josh. 8:1); or, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die” (Judg. 6:23); “Don’t be afraid, . . . Those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (2 Kings 6:16); “I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Ps. 23:4); “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” (Ps. 27:1); “Why should I fear when evil days come . . . ?” (Ps. 49:5); “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Ps. 118:6); “Do not fear, for I am with you” (Isa. 41:10); “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32); “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17, 18).

I have found the older I get that God never forgets anything. He knows all things, and He remembers His people, their sorrows, their sufferings, and all their needs. The only thing He forgets is our sins. “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (Isa. 43:25).

Nothing can touch the child of God without God’s permission. So we accept each hurt, each problem, each difficulty as from His hand, seeking to learn from it all that He would teach us—using all the resources of God at our disposal and asking Him to make it turn out for our good and His glory.

Naturally, I have not done all the work on this book alone. Without the help of a number of people it would have been impossible. In the two years I spent (off and on) writing this book, I had the constant help of my wife, Ruth; my secretary, Stephanie Wills; my associate, John Akers; Elsie Brookshire, Lucille Lytle and the others in my Montreat office. In addition, I want to thank those who read the manuscript and made many helpful suggestions: my longtime friend Carole Carlson; Canon Frank Colquhoun of the Anglican Church in England; Millie Dienert, our longtime friend and companion on holidays (along with her husband); my associate in the Minneapolis office, Ralph Williams; Estelle Brousseau of Montreat-Anderson College; and Al Bryant of Word, Incorporated.

In studying and writing on this subject my own life has been deepened, and I have rededicated my life to helping those who are hurting spiritually, physically, and psychologically. It is my prayer that this book will not only help and inspire many suffering Christians, but will be used of God to bring many nonbelievers to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Billy Graham

September 15, 1980
Montreat, North Carolina
“Till Armageddon”

CHAPTER 1

THE COMING STORM

Many writers predict that world headlines will continue to scream: catastrophic storms, violence, assassinations, torture, terrorism, World War III—the real war, Armageddon.

There is no doubt that global events are preparing the way for the final war of history—the great Armageddon! As the earthly time clock ticks off each second and the world approaches midnight, this planet, according to the Bible, is going to be plunged into suffering too horrible to imagine or comprehend. As the top of Mount St. Helens blew off early in 1980 and became one of the great disasters of that period, so the Bible teaches in Hebrews 12 that God is going to shake the whole earth. The Bible says, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens” (Heb. 12:26). The tremors that are leading to the greatest earthquake of all time are now being felt throughout the world.

HOLOCAUST IN THE WINGS

The ancient prophets warned about a time toward the end of history when people would be saying “Peace, peace, . . . when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). Thousands of peace conferences have been held since World War II, and yet the headlines continue to shout about war, violence, death, and streaming refugees. Governments of the world are rocked with war and bloodshed.

Yet only a few decades ago it was fashionable to write or suggest that the world was entering a great era of peace. We were told by many idealists that utopia would be ushered onto the scene, along with all the technological miracles of our time. The dream was an illusion. We should have learned from history. They dreamed of peace in the earlier part of the century, but that was shattered by World War I. They dreamed and planned for peace after World War I, but World War I was only a preparation for World War II. Now the signs are everywhere that the world is preparing feverishly for World War III, which could be the last war—Armageddon!

Permeating the media is the concentration on catastrophic headlines. Our movie theaters are jammed with the crowds who thrive on the disaster movies; endless with titles suggesting the most fearsome, unreal—and sometimes too realistic—fantasies.

Even the most cheerful optimists are predicting the probabilities of an increase in suffering in our wounded world. In the early days of ABC's *Good Morning America* Rona Barrett interviewed someone from the CIA who reported that germs capable of destroying nations have already been developed. There are new viruses, he said, that could cause a breakdown in the health of the populace of an entire continent. Chemical and germ warfare are part of the arms arsenal being developed throughout the world. Articles and documentary films are constantly being released, reporting that insects could someday be in control of our planet. One major news outlet concluded an editorial with the words: “There is a feeling that one is seeing the world in its twilight.”

Expressions like “racial suicide,” “racial genocide,” “the end of the world” and “the end of the human race” are cropping up in conversations, journals, and motion pictures throughout the world.

Terrorist groups are growing more and more daring in their attacks. We grow accustomed to atrocities that fill the news, like when the president of a West African government was killed, his son beheaded, and many members of his staff executed publicly by a firing squad; yet the story was a comparatively insignificant item buried in the back pages.

Nuclear weapons, germ warfare, and precarious international relationships are not the only indications of civilization on a collision course. Scientists warn that great climatic changes are in store for our world. We are told that the polar icecap seems to be slightly shifting, and this could affect our food-growing capabilities. Feeding the growing world population is an increasing burden. Statistics on the increase of earthquakes are overwhelming.

On the moral front, things look extremely bleak, especially through Judeo-Christian eyes. There is an explosion in the breakdown of marriages and the almost total rejection of moral law and guidelines. Drugs and alcohol are destroying the minds of millions. The emergence of satanic cults and witchcraft is especially widespread in America and Europe.

Pleasure has become the goal of millions. Hedonism is now almost in control. Pornography meets with little restraint. A publisher told me at Oxford that over 80 percent of modern novels center in perversion and the flouting of the moral law.

On every hand people are screaming for “liberation” and social justice. It seems the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. This is true of nations as well as individuals. The economic strength of the world has shifted to the oil-producing countries who have amassed billions they do not know how to spend. While Western Europe and America go deeper in debt, developing nations live on the knife-edge of starvation.

The theory that the world is getting better and better, and solving

its political, economic and social problems, is no longer taught with very much confidence. We are living in a day of serious turmoil and trouble, and most people to whom I talk forecast that things are going to get worse instead of better.

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Today we see a world which is unparalleled in its unrest, whether it is the unrest of the individual human heart, or of the social, political or even religious realms. The world is in the confusion and mess it's in today because it has rejected God and His moral order. The Scriptures themselves make it clear that when God's law is discarded the only intelligent, unifying principles for human life and conduct are also cast away.

With this rebellion against God, mankind has lost its sense of purpose and meaning in life and denied the worth of human personality, and other values that make life worthwhile. Most people of the world have some belief in a supernatural being—but we act like atheists! We think like atheists! We live and plan as if there were no God. We are living in a world that does not recognize God. When everyone does what is right in his own eyes, there is no possibility of order and peace. There will be more and more confusion and turmoil as people follow their own wicked devices.

Man is a rebel, and a rebel is naturally in confusion. He is in conflict with every other rebel. For a rebel by his very nature is selfish. He is seeking his own good and not the good of others. Sometimes through rationalization there can emerge unbiblical goals that seem for a time to have a unifying effect upon man, even creating mob interest and unity for a time—but these goals are temporary. There is no depth or meaning to them, and therefore these elements cannot bring unity to society.

The Bible indicates that in rejecting God and His principles for governing life, the world is heading for greater tension, confusion and turmoil that will ultimately set the stage for a future evil world ruler or system—the Antichrist.

THE ANTICHRIST AND ARMAGEDDON

While God has a plan for man's good, the devil also has a master plan. He will bring to power a counterfeit world ruler "the Antichrist," with a system that will establish a false utopia for an extremely short time. The economic and political problems of the world will *seem* to be solved. But after a brief rule the whole thing will come apart. During the reign of Antichrist, tensions will mount, and once again the world will explode—with a gigantic world war of overwhelming ferocity involving conflict and massacre on an unparalleled scale. Even the iron grip of the Antichrist will be unable to prevent it. This massive upheaval will be the world's last war—the Battle of Armageddon.

The Battle of Armageddon (and the events leading up to it) will usher in the most intensive suffering known to mankind. In the Bible we read that the earth will be ravaged by political, economic, and ecological crises beyond the realm of our imagination. The Bible teaches that if it were not for the merciful intervention of God the whole world would be destroyed.

CHRIST—THE VICTOR

In the midst of that whole, terrible, awful carnage described in many parts of the Bible, especially the Book of Revelation, Christ will return as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He Himself will defeat the Antichrist and be the victor of the Battle of Armageddon. At that climactic moment, God will set up His Kingdom—a whole new social and political order under His rule.

When Jesus Christ left His followers, He assured His disciples, "I will return!" And He is going to keep that promise. This is our hope.

I remember meeting Sir Winston Churchill during his last year as Prime Minister of Great Britain. It was in London just after one of our Wembley Stadium Crusades. During the course of our conversation Sir

Winston had three afternoon newspapers beside him and an unlighted cigar in his mouth. He said, "Young man, I want to ask you a question. I don't think that the world has very much longer to go. It's in so many troubles." He paused and asked, "Can you give an old man some hope?" I pulled out my New Testament and gave him the plan of salvation and told him about the return of Christ.

When I was sixteen, I was in revolt against church attendance. I attended because my parents expected me to go, but I could not wait to get away from home and having to go to church and Sunday school each week. Then an evangelist came to our town. I was not well acquainted with evangelists because our church did not normally cooperate with traveling evangelists. However, there had been a great deal in the press about this particular man, and one night, after he had been there several weeks, I went to hear him at the invitation of a friend. He spoke on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This turned out to be one of the major themes of his preaching. It absolutely fascinated me. I had never heard much about it. I never knew there was such a hope and that God had such marvelous things in store for those of the human race who believe in Him.

When is this going to happen? Is the present age drawing to a close? Is the kingdom age soon to be ushered in? I cannot give you any date; Jesus warned us that we were not to try to fix any exact time. History proves how easily we can be mistaken. When Napoleon was sweeping across Europe in the last century many Bible students thought he was the Antichrist. Many people thought Mussolini or Hitler was the Antichrist. They were anti-Christian, but they were not the great Antichrist who is yet to come. The Bible teaches that someday Jesus Christ is coming back to earth. The Scripture holds out both hope and warning.

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with

everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

(2 THESS. 1:6–10)

The very fact that believers have the hope of the coming of Christ should make us live for Christ every day as though He were coming at any moment. For those who do not know Christ, His soon-coming should drive them to God for forgiveness while there is yet time. This passage also indicates that those who disobey the gospel will get a glimpse of Jesus Christ in all of His glory, and then be banished from His presence forever. This will be the hell of hell for a person to carry into eternity the memory of what he missed by deliberately rejecting God's offer of love, mercy and grace in this present life.

AFTER ARMAGEDDON

There is a utopia coming. We pray in our churches, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven” (Matt. 6:10, κϱν). At the return of Christ, that prayer will be fully realized.

What will happen when the Messiah returns? The Bible teaches us that, in the aftermath of Armageddon, Jesus Christ will establish His reign upon the earth. This will be the greatest spiritual and moral revolution in history as Christ takes control and establishes His reign of righteousness in the world.

This is not a book of prophecy. There are many differing theological viewpoints extant about the future, but this is not the place to debate them. Nevertheless, there are several generalizations we can make about the future state of the world under the reign of Christ.

First, when Christ comes back, Satan is going to be bound. The Bible says, “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to

the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, . . . He threw him into the Abyss . . . to keep him from deceiving the nations any more” (Rev. 20:1–3). The nations today are being deceived on a grand scale, and the devil is doing his work of deception, causing the world to believe “a lie.” And he is deceiving individuals too; telling us that the “broad road” is the right one. But the Bible warns: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 14:12). The devil also is telling people that we have plenty of time to make up our minds about God, eternity, and Christ. He is telling us that we don’t need God at all—that they can get along without Christ. He is telling us that we can go to heaven without being born again. Jesus said you can’t. The devil is saying that there is more pleasure in the world than there is in following Christ. There is not. It will be a glorious day when Satan is bound. No longer will he be able to deceive us, our families, and the nations of the world.

Second, during Christ’s reign there will be universal justice and peace. There is no such thing as absolute justice in the world today. Economic and social injustices stubbornly resist the best efforts of men and governments to uproot them. The headlines every day tell us there also is no such thing as lasting peace in our world, in spite of countless peace conferences.

But some day justice and peace will be established among all people. The Bible promises, “See, a king will reign in righteousness” (Isa. 32:1). It also tells us, “He will be called . . . Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end” (Isa. 9:6, 7).

Shortly after the United Nations building had been erected on the banks of the East River in New York City, I was taken on a tour of the building by an ambassador friend from another country. He showed me an empty room and said, “This is the prayer room.” It was absolutely empty: there was no symbol, nothing to indicate that there was any God at all. When the United Nations was founded it was agreed the word *God* should be left out of its charter. The world has left God out of its planning.

But all that is going to be changed. When Jesus comes back He is coming not as the lowly Nazarene carpenter riding on a donkey. He is coming in divine majesty and power and glory. He is coming as a Prince, as a King, with thousands of His angel-warriors with Him. The mightiest army the universe has ever known will be arrayed. And though the Antichrist will declare war on Him, the victory will be His. Emerging triumphant from the smoke of that last terrible, awful war, will be the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

When Jesus comes back we will know safety and security. George Washington's favorite verse of Scripture was Micah 4:4; and he quoted it constantly: "Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken."

During Christ's reign, political confusion will be turned to order and harmony, social injustices will be abolished, and moral corruption will be replaced by integrity. For the first time in history the whole world will know what it is like to live in a society governed by God's principles. And Satan's influence will not be present to hinder world peace, unity, equality, and justice. Man's dream for global harmony will be realized!

Finally, the Bible teaches us that when Christ comes again every person who has ever lived will stand before God's judgment.

When those who have repented of their sin in rebellion against God and accepted Jesus as their Savior and the Lord of their lives appear before God, He will usher them into their new home—heaven and all its glories. This will be the Garden of Eden restored. People will see God face to face and live with Him in an environment free of fears, failures, and fatigue.

But those who chose to reject God during their lifetime on earth will be separated from Him for eternity. This is not God's desire, but man's own choice. God holds every individual accountable for his rejection of Christ.

God does not want people to separate themselves from Him eternally. At the same time, God will not force a man to live in heaven against his

will. In 2 Peter 3:9 the apostle says that God is “patient . . . not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that he gave his *one and only* Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (italics mine). At great cost to Himself, God has made it possible for each of us to live with Him eternally. Those who reject God’s offer of a heavenly home will be assigned to hell.

When we are called before God and His throne of judgment, it will be too late to reverse our decision. It is during our lifetime here on earth that we decide our eternal destiny.

TILL ARMAGEDDON

We have had a glimpse of the future—both its horror and its hope. But what about the present? How do we prepare for the suffering we may possibly have to face as our world moves relentlessly toward a period of intense tribulation—to be climaxed at Armageddon? And how do we prepare for the daily armageddons we each face, the problems and suffering that are part of every human life? Whether or not Christians will actually have to face the period of tribulation around Armageddon is a matter of debate among equally sincere Bible scholars. But there can be no doubt that suffering in one form or another comes to us all. And we can be certain that God will give us the strength and resources we need to live through any situation in life that He ordains. The will of God will never take us where the grace of God cannot sustain us. As we shall see in the pages that follow, God is also able to take every situation in life—no matter how difficult—and use it to draw us closer to Himself.

Because suffering is a natural part of human existence, we must learn to cope with it. And for the Christian, in particular, there seems to be a unique set of sufferings. God wants us to learn how to deal with our trials and temptations in dependence on His power. The Bible and the history of the church both demonstrate that God’s way for the suffering of His people has not always been the way of escape, but the way of endurance.

But how can we endure the crises of death, persecution, or physical illness? How do we cope with the heartaches of family strife, divorce, financial burdens? How do we live through the tensions of a world crowded with national disasters and social injustices?

That is what this book is about. It is a book about suffering, and how to deal with it. When Christ returns as the victor at Armageddon, suffering will be abolished. *Till Armageddon* we must learn to live triumphantly amid the traumas and pressures we face daily. We must prepare for our own personal armageddons.

CHAPTER 2

PERSONAL ARMAGEDDONS

SUFFERING IS UNIVERSAL

We don't deliberately look for trouble in life. It comes. Suffering is a universal fact; no one can escape its claws. The rain falls upon the just and the unjust. We all face personal armageddons.

Some people have the mistaken idea that becoming a Christian will be a shelter from the personal storms of life. The story of many of our hymns will swiftly dispel this myth. A large number of our favorite hymns and spiritual songs were composed in the crucible of life.

Many illustrations could be given. Charlotte Elliott, when she was a helpless invalid, wrote "Just As I Am." Frances Ridley Havergal, author of "Take My Life" and many other hymns, suffered much ill health. Fanny Crosby was blind, yet out of her suffering came such lovely songs as "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." The hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious

Way” was composed by the poet William Cowper in an hour of great mental distress.

One of the most frequently read portions of the Bible is the Book of Psalms. We turn to them so often because of the wide range of moods and experiences they represent. We can relate to them and find comfort in them because they reflect real life, with its joys and sorrows. Many of the Psalms were produced during periods of national and personal crises.

Psalm 137 expresses the heartache and agony of a people banished from their native land:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars
we hung our harps.

(Ps. 137:1, 2)

After ravaging the land of Israel, the Babylonian army had forced its captives to march toward a land of exile and a terrifying future. Depressed and forlorn, the Hebrews discarded their musical instruments. There was no song left in their hearts. This Psalm keenly captures the feelings of a refugee people.

Many of the Psalms reflect the personal crises faced by David, Israel’s greatest king. We regard him as a man of unbelievable successes—his youthful triumph over the Philistine giant Goliath, his remarkable rise from shepherd boy to monarch, his notable victories over Israel’s foes. But David was also a man of unbearable sorrow. Unjustly accused of treason, he was forced to live for years as a fugitive. One of his sons died in infancy, some were morally corrupt, and others were ruthlessly murdered. At one point in his kingship, his own nation turned against him as another son attempted a coup.

God called David “a man after [my] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). Although God obviously loved David, He did not exempt him from suffering.

No one is exempt from the touch of tragedy: neither the Christian nor the non-Christian; neither the rich nor the poor; neither the leader nor the commoner. Crossing all racial, social, political, and economic barriers, suffering reaches out to unite mankind.

THE REALITY OF SUFFERING

Suffering is difficult to talk or write about, for it is not something that can adequately be examined outside the realm of experience. It is not abstract, nor is it philosophical. It is real and concrete. It leaves its scars. When the winds of adversity have passed, we are seldom unchanged.

It is only when one has passed through a crisis event that one can truly comprehend what it means to suffer. And often it is only in retrospect that we realize the purpose and value of our suffering.

Struggles in life can uncover untold depths of character and unknown strength for service. People who go through life unscathed by sorrow and untouched by pain tend to be shallow in their perspective on life. Suffering, on the other hand, tends to plow up the surface of our lives to uncover the depths that provide greater strength of purpose and accomplishment. Only deeply plowed earth can yield bountiful harvests.

Pain has many faces. One can suffer physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Our difficulties are rarely confined to only one of these areas; they tend to overlap in human experiences. Some of the most intensive suffering can be psychologically induced and frequently lead to complications in the physical realm.

There are as many invisible hurts as there are visible hurts, and there can be difficulty in diagnosing them. We know that the unseen part of man is often the victim of the most debilitating of pains. In certain circumstances, a man can endure excruciating physical pain; and yet he can be felled by one unkind word. When we hear the story of the torture inflicted upon a P.O.W., we are astounded by his personal fortitude and

the resiliency of the human body. But that same man's life can be devastated by a single viciously perpetrated act or word.

Scripture has much to say about the power of the tongue to inflict cruelty. The psalmist says that bitter words are like deadly arrows. James wrote: "The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body" (James 3:5, 6).

Man is capable of great victories and susceptible to great defeats. Man is both strong and sensitive. As the psalmist exclaimed, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14).

In earnest we must endeavor to apply this sensitivity when dealing with the matter of suffering, especially as we consider the sufferings of others. We cannot feel someone else's pain. We can see the anguish in his face and try to empathize. But we do not have his nerve endings. We cannot fully know the magnitude of his anguish. We must never minimize the suffering of another. Scripture's mandate to us is, "Weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15, KJV).

Our physical sufferings express a great truth. As C. S. Lewis cogently penned, "Pain . . . plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul."¹ The truth is this—man's body is mortal, temporal. Man must look beyond himself to find immortality.

Suffering is one of God's ways of speaking to us, of awakening us to our need of Him, and calling us to Himself. To quote C. S. Lewis again: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."² If our suffering leads us to God, it has become a blessed and precious friend.

We are indebted to modern medical science for the tremendous strides made in finding cures for so many diseases and harnessing others. Through dedicated efforts, progress is being made daily in the discovery of new ways of relieving the physical sufferings of mankind. Many lives have been saved and are now being sustained as a result of such scientific advances.

And yet pain is still with us. Many of you know the reality of cancer,

strokes, heart attacks, birth defects, auto injuries. Many of you have been bedridden and racked with pain for years. Some of you are shocked by the discovery of a friend's or relative's terminal illness. Maybe you yourself are facing the prospect of death. Let me assure you that you do not need to face your situation alone. God wants to comfort and help you.

Some suffering comes as a natural result of the deterioration of the body. Some forms of physical suffering are inflicted upon us by others.

Throughout the history of Christianity, followers of Christ have suffered persecution. In an African country a young Christian school principal was dragged from his office into the street where he was about to be shot. The curious townspeople crowded one side of the street and the school children the other. The young principal asked his captors if he could have just a few minutes, and when they granted his request he sang out: "Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus, I come; Jesus, I come," after which he was shot. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. While Christians in America have worshiped without the fear or threat of physical abuse for their beliefs, thousands of their brothers in Christ throughout the world have been tortured and martyred for confessing the name of Christ.

There may come a day when we Americans will undergo intense persecution for our faith. Are you prepared to face martyrdom? Jesus gave His life for you. You may be called to give your life for Him. God has many precious promises for those who suffer for Christ. We will be looking at these later in this book.

MENTAL SUFFERING

E. Stanley Jones tells the story of a minister who was preparing a series of ten sermons on the topic, "How to Avoid Having a Nervous Breakdown." Before his work was completed, he himself had a breakdown. The pressure of trying to meet the deadline was too great for him.

All of us experience some form of mental anxiety during our

lifetimes. The spectrum of mental suffering is wide, ranging from the worry experienced by a young person in a sports' competition to the nervous breakdown of a corporation executive.

We are all susceptible to depression—and Christians are no exception.

Elijah, that dynamic and dedicated prophet of God, valiantly and effectively defended the cause of God in terrifying confrontations with paganism. Elijah rose to great heights of faith as he withstood the continued threats of vile King Ahab and his vicious wife, Jezebel (1 Kings 19). But there came a point in his life when he wanted to give up entirely. Even the simple demands in life became *too great to bear*. “It is enough,” he said, “now, O Lord, take away my life” (v. 4, KJV). He was overwhelmed by a combination of exhaustion and depression.

God did not grant his request, nor did He remonstrate with him. God knew that Elijah was suffering from exhaustion and depression and gave him what he needed: sleep and food, and the reassurance that he was not alone. God saw the root of Elijah's problem: he had expended his physical and mental resources. He had gone beyond his breaking point. Someone has said, “How many problems are solved by a good night's sleep.” But the ones that are still with us when we wake up need the special touch of God.

Another important figure in the history of Christianity suffered in a similar fashion. Toward the end of a popular and flourishing ministry, John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas, the governor of Galilee. John, the man of the desert with its wide open spaces and unending stretch of sky, lay in a dark, dank dungeon.

During his imprisonment John's faith was shaken to its very roots. This was the same John who had said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, KJV).

What had caused him to question?

He had understood when some of his disciples had left him to follow Jesus. Then he had denounced Herod for living with his brother's wife, and was thrown in prison. Matthew tells us, “Now when John had heard

in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:2, 3, KJV).

What had John heard about the works of Jesus? Had he heard that He had eaten with publicans and sinners? Had he heard that Jesus had been compassionate toward a woman taken in adultery, the very sin that John had confronted that landed him in prison? Or had he heard of Jesus' miracles?

Jesus could have rescued John, but he didn't; no word had been raised in protest over Herod's action; the unopened prison, unexplained. Perhaps it was everything combined that caused John's faith to waver.

Our Lord's reply to the distressed prophet is most notable. After reassuring John regarding His identity, He praised both John and his ministry (Matt. 11:1–11). Vance Havner once made this instructive observation regarding the episode: "When John said his worst about Jesus, Jesus said His best about John."

Depressed people need reassurance and encouragement. Jesus knew this and practiced it. We can learn much from the way God dealt with Elijah and from Jesus' dealings with John. They can serve as our models for ministering to those burdened by mental anxieties. People in distress need a gentle, helping hand and words of encouragement.

Christians are particularly susceptible to exhaustion that leads to depression. With a sense of dedication to God that inspires them to work diligently for His kingdom, they often assume overwhelming tasks and ignore warning signs. With no one else to assist, and seeing a job to be done, they overwork themselves and fall prey to depression.

We need to be alert to such cases.

Each of us has his own unique, God-given set of abilities and talents—his own personal potential for accomplishment. Not all of us work at the same speed or reach the same heights. God does not want us to compete against each other. He wants us to learn to work within our own individual capacities.

Jesus told a parable in which He taught that one day every Christian's

works would be evaluated by Him personally. Jesus explained that He would judge a person, not by what we do in comparison with others, but by what we do with the capabilities God has given.

God has given each of us special abilities and potentials and certain limitations. Let us develop our abilities and strive to work toward our potentials, learning where our breaking points lie. Sometimes it is simply a matter of moving forward, stopping for a rest, and then continuing.

A well-tuned machine gives the best performance. A well-tuned, balanced Christian life will be the most productive for the kingdom of God.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUFFERING

All of us suffer disappointments in life. Sometimes the effect upon us can be minor. At other times our lives can be devastated.

Loneliness, for instance, may be so intense that proper functioning as a man or woman is almost impossible. Shortly after her beloved consort Prince Albert died, Queen Victoria is reported to have confided in her trusted friend, Dean Stanley, that she was “always wishing to consult one who is not here, groping by myself, with a constant sense of desolation.”

Many of you are suffering from *rejection*, a hurt which causes great damage, for it affects us deep within. Possibly a girlfriend or boyfriend has dropped you for someone else. Or your marriage is breaking up over a third party. Possibly you have been interviewed for an important job and been turned down.

We see so many emotional and psychological sufferings among young people today. Suicide rates high among young adults.³ The current generation may face greater pressures than any other generation in modern times. Academically, students compete at the undergraduate level for elite positions in graduate school. One of our leading medical schools, to which only the most highly qualified apply, is highly competitive. One has to be incredibly strong to compete.

Many students find themselves in the midst of preparing for a future in a particular career only to face a declining job market.

The cost of education is increasing, forcing many students to bear the responsibility of working while they are at school.

By and large, in recent decades our society has discouraged our youth from looking to God for help. Without God as a source of guidance and strength, youth have turned to escapism through drugs, which has created new and deep-seated problems.

Insecurities can be crippling. We have fears that plague us and keep us from stepping out on new adventures and striving after new accomplishments. Often we hesitate to be aggressive in situations because we fear failure. There may be a job to do, but we do not feel adequate or qualified. Or we feel that we cannot do as good a job as our predecessor.

How would you feel stepping into the shoes of Moses, that man of miracles whom God chose to lead the Hebrew people out of Egyptian bondage? Apparently Joshua, Moses' well-trained apprentice who was to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, experienced a great sense of insecurity. During one particular "pep talk" with the new leader, God had to tell him three times not to be afraid. And the third time, God explained why Joshua could begin his new responsibilities with confidence:

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, *for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*

(JOSH. 1:9, ITALICS MINE)

God promised His presence. And where God is, there also we find His peace and His power—a power which enables us to rise above discouragement and which leads us through the defeats in life. As we shall see, God can even use our disappointments to bring good into our lives. God does not call us to be successful, but to be obedient.

We must remember that we *are* weak vessels, through whom God can channel His power to accomplish *His* purposes. As one conference speaker is often heard saying, “God, I can’t; but you can, so let’s go!”

Emotional and psychological problems can result from things that come into our lives. But we can also be crippled by those things that do not come into our lives.

Some people are emotionally disabled because of an absence of love in their lives—particularly in their childhood. Those who have not received love in their early life find it difficult to give love later on. Nevertheless, regardless of how twisted and disordered our lives may be, God is able to bring us peace and He can put the pattern back into our lives.

SPIRITUAL SUFFERINGS

Not all pain is destructive. There is a sense in which pain acts as a warning system, alerting us that medical assistance is needed. This can also be true spiritually.

These are times when we agonize over unconfessed sin in our lives. Our guilt erupts in tense relationships, nervous habits, and sleepless nights. Our consciences are heavily burdened until we come to the Great Physician for healing. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The struggle against sin can produce a form of suffering. The Bible speaks of this as a battle. But we do not go into the battle defenseless. God equips us with His “full armor” (Eph. 6:13). Jesus can release us from the power of Satan and sin. We are not compelled to go the way of our temptations. But God expects us to fight. God does not promise to take the battle from us, but to take us through the battle.

When we become Christians we gain a Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ. But we also gain an enemy—Satan. Satan attempts to lure us from the path of spiritual progress. And he seeks to destroy our service to Him.

But we must remember this. First, Satan is *not* omnipotent. He is not God's equal. He is a fallen angel, not a fallen god. Second, nothing can come into our lives without God's knowledge and permission. Satan is actually under God's authority. He had to receive God's permission to test Job. Third, God can produce good out of the trials and afflictions that Satan tries to put in the Christian's path.

The gospels record an episode in Jesus' life in which He was in the midst of teaching in a synagogue. Unexpectedly, a demon-possessed man jumped to his feet and began yelling. You see, Satan was trying to disrupt; he did not want Jesus' audience to learn about the kingdom of God and the truths of eternal life. Immediately Jesus cast out the demon, thus demonstrating His complete authority over the spiritual world. His audience, already impressed by His teaching, was now doubly impressed by His power (Mark 1:21–27). What Satan tried to do to hinder Jesus, actually helped Him.

Satan must be the most frustrated personality in the universe! His army of demons is compelled to obey Jesus, and whatever the devil does to discourage a Christian, God can use for the Christian's benefit. Sometimes He allows us to suffer so that we may grow spiritually.

Most often suffering cannot be accurately or fully understood except in retrospect. Not until time has ceased and eternity begun will Job understand why God allowed him to be tested as he was. Not until then will the challenging and comforting role that he has played through the centuries in countless thousands of lives be fully known.

GOD WANTS TO HELP YOU

Science devised a remarkable machine, the body scanner, which can detect disorders in the body, which evade even the X-ray. Sometimes we have hurts that are too deep and sensitive for others to see or help.

But who except God Himself can scan the invisible me—my heart, my soul, my spirit? There are hurts in our personalities too deep and

too complicated for even the most sophisticated modern techniques to diagnose or to solve.

Only God Himself who made us understands us fully. As the psalmist said, “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar” (Ps. 139:1, 2). Only God can diagnose our problem accurately and will show us how to solve it; and when there is no solution, He will give us the grace to live with it. Only God can answer our question, “Why?” and when there is no answer, give us His peace and grace to live with “the unanswered.”

God wants to help us when we suffer. He can give His *presence* for comfort, His *power* for endurance, His *purpose* so that we might gain insight into our situation. And He can produce within us valuable qualities that will strengthen and mold our lives.

God can help us because He alone knows *why* we are suffering and *where* the suffering can take us.

He can also help us because *He* knows *what* it means to suffer. When we go through difficult times and turn to someone for counsel and comfort, we seek someone who can understand—someone who has experienced a similar situation and can relate to our feelings.

God can relate to us because He has suffered in the person of His Son.

The Son of God left the realms of heaven, became a man, and lived for thirty-three years in a suffering world. He ministered to suffering people. He encountered all types of physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual problems—and He demonstrated His ability to deal with each one. Your problem is not new to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is neither surprised nor baffled by it.

Jesus not only saw the sufferings of others—He Himself suffered. He experienced trials and temptations hard for us to fathom.

He knew *physical* suffering. At times, He found His ministry physically exhausting and needed to seek refreshment. As far as experiencing intense physical pain, He endured a cruel torture and painful death: flogging and crucifixion. He knew *mental*, *emotional*, and *psychological*

suffering. So often He experienced personal *rejection*. His brothers mocked Him and His ministry. When He preached in His hometown, the crowd ran Him out of the village and even tried to kill Him. Eventually the religious leaders of His own nation plotted His death.

And Jesus experienced *loneliness*. At times even His own chosen apostles completely misunderstood Him. Who could fully relate in a friendship to someone who was both God and man? After a long day of demanding work, Jesus found comfort and strength in praying to His Father in heaven.

Imagine the trauma of leaving the environment of heaven, where He was recognized and revered as the Son of God by thousands of angels—and coming to a sin-marred earth where He was met with scorn and contempt.

Jesus knew *spiritual* suffering. At the beginning of His public ministry Satan tempted Him unmercifully for forty days. And Satan returned throughout Jesus' ministry to try to defeat the Son of God and deflect Him from His mission. Jesus withstood him and won the battle.

And Jesus experienced a spiritual suffering more intense than you and I will ever know. For a period of time while He was on the cross, He experienced the horror of separation from God and cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" For Jesus, this was the greatest agony of all. To be forsaken by the Father who loved Him—to have the Father turn His back on the Son—this was the supreme suffering, the ultimate penalty for sin. You and I, if we have received Christ as Savior, will never have to be separated from God, because Jesus paid that penalty for sin. This is why Paul could so confidently claim:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(ROM. 8:38, 39)

Nothing will ever separate us from God! Because Jesus, in His suffering, was separated from God on our behalf, we now have *eternal life* through trusting in Him as Savior.

So the Son of God can relate to us in our hour of need. He can relate to our suffering—He can do something for us. As Thomas Moore's hymn so beautifully expresses:

Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
*Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.*⁴

God wants to help us. You may be going through difficulties right now. Or possibly your life is currently free from tragedy. Regardless of your particular circumstances, it is important to prepare for suffering. Suffering rarely makes a reservation ahead of time.

This book will explore ways in which you can prepare for your personal armageddons by understanding biblical teachings on suffering.

Now, if you are someone for whom a personal relationship with God is a new concept, if you do not know the reality of the living God taking up residence within your life, if you have never confessed your sins and received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to personally invite you to do this now.

This is the first step in getting God's help. He wants to heal you on the inside. He wants to cure your deepest problem first—the problem of personal sin.

Confess your sin, receive Jesus as your Savior, and then begin a new life with Him. You will find God's peace in your heart, His guidance in your life, and the comfort of His presence through your suffering—through your personal armageddon, whatever form it may take.