Trials

2 Corinthians 4:7-10  
But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.  
We are troubled on every side, yet not distrest; we are perplexed, but not in despair;  
Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;  
Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul refers more than once to the Isthmian Games, which were held once every five years at the Isthmus of Corinth. The athletic terms he uses are thus very familiar to them.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25  
Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.  
And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, Paul uses four pairs of expressions taken from the games (three from wrestling and one from running) to illustrate what really happens when Christians find themselves in trials.

1. **WE ARE TROUBLED ON EVERY SIDE, YET NOT DISTRESSED**

   We are hedged in (pressed) on every side – troubled … in every way, but not cramped or crushed (AMP)
   • This word shows the wrestler trapped by an opponent’s move no matter where he turns - Paul had this experience!

2 Corinthians 12:7-10  
And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.  
For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.  
And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.  
Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2. **WE ARE PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR**

   We suffer embarrassments and are perplexed and unable to find a way out, but not driven to despair (AMP)
   • This word shows the wrestler puzzled by his opponent’s skill and not knowing what to do - John the Baptist had this experience!
   • He knew what the prophecies said and what the Messiah was capable of doing, but he was in prison! (Matthew 11:2-6)

3. **[WE ARE] PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN**

   We are (persecuted and hard driven,) pursued, but not deserted – to stand alone (AMP)
   • This word shows the runner out in front, but being pursued closely by his opponent - David had this experience!
   • The anointing made him a fugitive before it made him a king. But, while being hunted by Saul, he was able to write Psalm 34 in the Cave of Adullam.

Psalm 34:1-4  
A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed. I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall be in my mouth.

Psalm 34:18-19  
The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

4. **[WE ARE] CAST DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED**

   We are struck down to the ground, but never struck out and destroyed (AMP)
   • This word shows the wrestler thrown down by his opponent but rising to continue the fight - Job had this experience!
   • He lost everything in one day (7 sons, 3 daughters, 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, dozens of servants, his wife!)

Job 23:8-10  
Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him:  
On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him:  
But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

   • J.B. Phillips translates 2 Corinthians 4:9 – “we are knocked down but not knocked out!”
   • For the Roman gladiator who was knocked down in battle, the final “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” came only from the emperor. God has the final say over your life!
WHAT IS GOD’S PURPOSE IN OUR TRIALS?

2 Corinthians 4:10  Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

- Eagle stirring up nest to make her young uncomfortable so they learn to fly (Deut. 32:11)
- Bee struggling through wax in hive to remove wing membrane so it can be able to fly
- God uses life’s bad experiences to teach us something good – dependence on Him!

2 Corinthians 4:7  But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us

- Clay vessels were cheap, breakable and replaceable – emphasis is on the treasure inside!
- The power of the gospel is not in us or in any power we could generate, but in Jesus!
- The messenger's weakness is not FATAL to what he does, it is ESSENTIAL! (12:9-10)

As a clay vessel is marred, fractured and broken by the circumstances of life, more of the treasure shows through – and even spills out!