

Trials

2 Corinthians 4:7-10 ⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. ⁸ We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 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.

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 ²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. ²⁵ 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 ⁷ 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. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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)

Isaiah 35:4-6 ⁴ Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ⁶ Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

Isaiah 61:1 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;*

Matthew 11:4-6 ⁴ Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. (JESUS DOESN'T FINISH THE PROPHECY!) ⁶ **And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.**

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 ¹ 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 continually be in my mouth. ² My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. ³ O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Psalm 34:7-8 ⁷ The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. ⁸ O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

Psalm 34:18-19 ¹⁸ The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. ¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

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 ⁸ Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: ⁹ 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: ¹⁰ 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!