

Weekly Devotions: THE REFINING FIRE OF TRIALS 1

Have a Balcony View of Your Trials

Alistair McGrath in *Suffering and God* emphasizes the importance of looking at trials, hardship, senseless suffering from two angles: the view from the balcony and journey on the road. He said our struggle with God during trials is often personal, more subjective than objective. We struggle because we ourselves are in pain or because someone we love is suffering. Hardly is our struggle objective, for example, the emotions we have for the terminally ill in hospital is different from that we have when our loved one is diagnosed with terminal illness.

McGrath advised that it is important for us to step out of the road to go up to the balcony to have a broader perspective, to see what God is doing in and through our trials. There are invaluable life's lessons we can learn from them but we must learn to see them from God's perspective. We must also look at trials under the light of who God is; His power, sovereignty and unconditional, steadfast love for us.

Read Isaiah 45: 9-13; 17-25

The Jews were shocked that God had called Cyrus, a non-Jew, His chosen one and raised him to rule over them. Barry Webb in his exposition on Isaiah 45 said, "They (the Jews) cannot see past the fact that Cyrus is a pagan, and because God's chosen way of working does not fit their own notions of what is proper they cannot rejoice in it. They are trapped in small-mindedness, like the Pharisees of later times."

In response, God asked whether it makes sense for the clay to question the potter why he has shaped the pot this way. Or for a child to question his parents (9-10) what they had given birth to. Our limited understanding during times of difficulty not only hinder us from appreciating what God is doing in our lives, it deprives us of peace and joy. We must trust that no matter how difficult the crisis, God's plan for us is always good.

Questions to ponder

1. What attribute of God is repeated throughout Isaiah 45? Why did Isaiah repeat this about God?
2. What does vv. 17-25 tell us about God, His promise to His people and His salvation? The Jews could not accept that God would raise a pagan to rule over them. In your trial what faith issue do you struggle with? Does it help to view your situation from the "balcony"?
3. Isaiah described God as the Potter and we are the clay. What type of 'vessel' is God making you out to be through your trial/s?