

## **Weekly Devotions: THE REFINING FIRE OF TRIALS 9**

### **Trials Help Us to have a Small View of Self and a Big View of God**

For God to increase, we must decrease. We are not likely to appreciate God's power and faithfulness when things are going well in our lives. But when our world collapses and everything we trust; our wealth, our capabilities, our strength fail us, then will we appreciate that our God never fails us and only He can help us. Problems open our eyes to our human limitations and drive us to look to God for help. We come to recognize the supremacy and sufficiency of God's power when we are in situations beyond us. Troubles, especially those that persist, humble us and cause us to admit that we are not invincible. Only God is omnipotent and nothing is impossible to Him.

### **Read 2 Cor. 12: 7-10**

Paul was highly qualified and had accomplished much in bringing the gospel to the known world. On top of that, he had supernatural encounters and was gifted in performing signs and wonder. All these could easily get into his head and led him to feel spiritually superior to others. But there was something in his life, a 'thorn in the flesh' that plagued him continuously and which he could not get rid of.

Scholars differ in their views about what Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (7) was; some think it is a physical affliction, others believe it may be the persecution he had to face, a difficult co-laborer, Jewish opponents, spiritual attack or temptation of the flesh. Whatever the 'thorn' was, the effect was unbearable for Paul. The word translated 'harass' (ESV), 'torment' (NIV) in verse 7 actually means to 'strike with the fist', to 'brutally beat', not just once or a few times but repeatedly. This 'thorn' kept tormenting Paul. He earnestly petitioned God to make it go away but God's reply was that He would give Paul the grace and strength to bear with it. Paul came to accept that this prolonged agony actually kept him from becoming conceited in his ministry. It also led him to be dependent on God whose power was revealed in and through his weakness. In our time of weakness we can look to God who will sustain us with His power (9).

### *Questions to Ponder*

1. Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' kept him humble (7). Do you also have a 'thorn in the flesh' and how has it affected you and kept you dependent on God?
2. What did Paul ask God to do for him and what was God's response to him (8-10)? How did Paul come to see this persistent problem in his life?
3. What hinder you from putting your total trust in God? What do you see is your 'weakness' and what does it mean for God's power to 'be perfected in your weakness'?