

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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**Broadcast Date:** 31 July 2011

**No.** T0687

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## **Facing the challenge of the world today: Staying positive in a negative world**

Good morning and thank you for tuning in to *Truth for Today*. We trust that the Lord will bless you and encourage you as you hear His word. Today is the start of a new series called 'Facing the challenge of the world today' and the subject of our talk this morning is 'Staying positive in a negative world'.

Recently I decided to look for some positive headlines in a newspaper. Page after page there were headlines like "40,000 job cuts feared", "Soldiers kill 23 people", "Recovery at risk". It is no wonder that we start to form a negative mind set, when we are constantly reading and listening to the depressing headlines of the media. Another evening while we were watching the news, every newflash was worse than the other. My daughter turned to me and said, 'It's a terrible world that we live in, Dad'. I don't think anyone of us would disagree. So what is our reaction to this world's news? Each one of us will form different attitudes when hearing today's news; some will be sad and genuinely concerned as to the state of things in the world, some will get depressed and down, some will take no thought and will have no concern as long as they are alright. As Christians we are also affected in similar ways. We live and work daily in this world and we are concerned where things are heading. But we must not forget we live in a world that is heading quickly to judgement. As Christians we have the responsibility to pray for those in authority in this world. (1 Timothy 2:1-12) We must also pray for all those who do not know Christ and are not aware of the judgement to come. We are in a favoured position and we must give thanks to God for His goodness, His mercy and His grace toward us.

The Christian circle is no different. In it we see lots of things that would get us down. As we look around at christendom today, we see an acceptance of wrong truth, the disobedience and the denial of God's word. Christian families are breaking up. Churches and Gospel Halls are empty, with many closing. Christians disagree and fall out with each other. All around us there is much more that would discourage us rather than encourage us.

Each one of us has different circumstances in life for which you could say to me, "It is all right you telling me to be positive but look at my problems". I agree, but this is probably the main cause of our negative thoughts. We look at things from our perspective rather than from God's. I trust that what we read, and what God would say to us today will help and encourage us all.

### **So how do Christians stay positive in a negative world?**

There are two passages of Scripture that I would like to draw your attention to. I hope they will help us to look on the positive rather than the negative.

1. Deuteronomy 1:21-32
2. Philippians 4:1-9

#### **1. Deuteronomy 1:21-32**

The first passage is about twelve chosen men, who were sent into the Land of Canaan to spy out the land, and bring a report of what they had seen. If you have a Bible please turn to Deuteronomy 1:21-32 "Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged. And every one of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.' The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe. And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out. They also took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, 'It is a good land which the LORD our God is giving us.' Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; and you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, "The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there."' Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the

wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.' Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God."

It is interesting to read of the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. The LORD was very faithful with His people who continually doubted Him, complained about Him and disobeyed His word. He takes them out of the slavery of Egypt, and promises to lead them into the Promised Land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord provided for them in every way, He fed them, nourished them, led them by night and day. After many years in the wilderness, the Lord instructed Moses to choose twelve men of standing, one from each tribe and send them to spy out the land of Canaan. They were given clear instructions as to what they had to look for. You can read the whole story in Numbers 13:1-14:45. They searched the land for forty days and they came back with their report. Joshua and Caleb came back with a true and honest report, and encouraged the people to go and possess the land. On the other hand, the other ten spies came back with an evil report. Had they see something different, I doubt it! They both saw the same things but drew different conclusions from them. Joshua and Caleb saw things from God's side; the other ten saw things from an unbelieving, selfish, human point of view. The problem was that the ten persuaded the people that everything was bad. This caused them to weep and they were very discouraged. So not only can we be discouraged ourselves but we can discourage others as well. We must be very careful, then, with our attitude to things. The key here is that Joshua and Caleb walked with the LORD. In fact it is said of Caleb that he "followed the LORD fully" (Numbers 14:24). Joshua and Caleb trusted in God and they were confident that He would be with them in every trial and circumstance. Joshua and Caleb recommended to the people that they should go in and possess the land. These men had faith which gave them this confidence to look ahead with courage. We should take an example from these men, and even though it means that we are in the minority, we should stand up today in faith and be positive, knowing that God is on our side.

## 2. **Philippians 4:1-9**

The second passage that I would like to read is in Philippians 4:1-9: "Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."

Paul is speaking here to Christians. Paul points out that Christ is the believer's strength. With this in mind, we should rejoice rather than be anxious about things. In Philippians 4:4, he encourages us to always rejoice in the Lord and he underlines this by repeating; "again I say rejoice". So our circumstances should not really matter because our rejoicing is in the Lord. Our eyes should be fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). I suppose an example of this was Peter as he walked toward the Lord on the sea; it was only when he looked around him at the wind and waves that he began to sink. (Matthew 14:22-33). If we are taken up with the circumstances around us we will get dragged down. In Philippians 4:5 we read that the Lord is coming soon which should also be a great joy and hope for the believer. To consider that the Lord is waiting for that moment to come into the air and to take all true believers home to His Father's house above; surely we can rejoice in this?

Often we read or hear words that would encourage us but practically it is still not very easy to always be positive and rejoicing. Philippians 4:6-9 might help us to work these things out practically. I believe they give us the answer to conquering worry and having a secure mind. But we must first meet God's conditions. There are three headings for you to remember:

- a. The right way to pray (Philippians 4:6-7);
- b. The right way to think (Philippians 4:8);
- c. The right way to live (Philippians 4:9).

### a. **The right way to pray (Philippians 4:6-7)**

Philippians 4:6 tells us. "So let your requests be made known to God". It is always important when we pray to begin with thanksgiving. It is always good to give thanks to God. The same verse tells us that we should pray for everything! Yes, everything! Even the smallest detail that we might feel is insignificant, He is interested in! All our anxious cares and thoughts we must bring before Him. When we have unburdened our hearts we are promised peace, not just any

peace as the world knows peace, but the peace of God. If we are diligent in these things with the right attitude, the promise is that our hearts and minds shall be kept through Jesus Christ.

**b. The right way to think (Philippians 4:8)**

Philippians 4:8 tells us the right things to think about. Our minds must be occupied with something. It is so easy to let our minds wander over things that don't really matter. We may also allow sinful thoughts to come in which damage our relationship with God and with our loved ones. What do we think when we look at others? Is our first thought always negative? Looking at things and people positively comes easier to some than others. The Apostle Paul gives us a list of good things to think about that should help us. We have to think on things that are true, honourable, pure, lovely and gracious; things of excellence and things worthy of praise. This should really change our attitude. Training our minds to think this way is very difficult and involves much prayer, dedication and determination. It is often said that God has more to do in us than through us.

**c. The right way to live (Philippians 4:9)**

Philippians 4:6 and 8 tell us what needs to be done inside, whereas Philippians 4:9 speaks of the right way to live as a Christian. The Apostle Paul was a great example to the Christians in his time. He lived out the Gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had to go through so much suffering and trial during his Christian life, so he knew what he was talking about. Paul might sound as if he is trying to glorify himself in this verse but I can assure you he is not. We can look back and see that all he wanted to do was be an example of Christ and glorify Him in all things. Paul's total focus in life was Christ, His Gospel and the followers of Christ. We must be faithful, just and real in this world. Our lives should reflect our Saviour. We must be single-minded and focused, looking always to be in the mind of Christ. The words of a hymn which is like a prayer would come to mind at this time.

*“May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and power controlling  
All I do and say.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me,  
As the waters fill the sea:  
Him exalting, self abasing,  
This is victory.”*

So as Christians we should be positive in our thoughts and in our walk in this world. We are children of God. We know the love of God, but are we really in the enjoyment of it? We belong to Lord Jesus Christ who paid a great price for us. Our place is prepared for us in heaven in the Father's house above. Everything is positive when we consider the things of God. We can be sure that God is in control. We should not be surprised by this world's news. We must accept that we will not be able to change this world, but with secure hearts and minds, we can be used by God as a blessing to others in this world. We must individually learn to trust Him throughout our lives. Proverbs 3:5-6 tell us "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths". If you noticed, I said 'learn'. We often look back and see how the children of Israel continually failed to trust God but we are no different; we are poor learners; we are stubborn and often fail to trust God in our lives. Let us take the promises of God in His word to our hearts. When we do put things in the right perspective we can enjoy the presence, power, understanding and the knowledge of God in our lives.

Paul with confidence and faith could say in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me", and in Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus".

May God richly bless you today. Amen.

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