

# How to maintain peace in difficult times

by Denver Cheddie

## John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

## Philippians 4

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

## Introduction

In 1993, Tropical Storm Brett was threatening my country Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad is located just below the hurricane belt, so we are not accustomed to hurricanes. Many of us were afraid, worried whether the storm would hit and whether we were even prepared to deal with the aftermath. Some of us barely slept that night. But there were other Trinidadians who left their homes to party in the streets of Port-of-Spain (our capital city). They were not in the least bit worried about any hurricane, "God is a Trini". Brett veered north at the last minute and missed Trinidad.

Were these unsaved, ungodly people privy to some secret to peace that the rest of us Christians didn't have? How could they be so calm knowing that a hurricane might hit and destroy everything they worked so hard for all their lives? As I thought about it, I realized the answer is no, they do not have some secret to peace. What they have is not peace at all, it is denial. Their assurance was based on the assumption that no hurricane was coming. Based on history, every time a hurricane threatened to come near to Trinidad, it would eventually veer north and miss us. Their comfort was based on their belief that no hurricane was going to hit.

BUT, if instead of a hurricane, they had received a phone call stating that a hitman was coming to wipe out their families, I can guarantee you that they would not be partying in the street. They would be in a mad panic, scrambling to get the next flight out of the country. They would be terrified.

What they had is the kind of peace that the world gives. Jesus gave us real peace – the kind of peace that could sleep through a storm and not in the least be worried or anxious. What is the secret to that kind of peace? In a world of global terrorism, economic recession, job layoffs, divorce, troubled and troublesome kids; how do you not go insane with worry and depression? What is the secret to having peace when everything is falling apart?

## **Eliminate Worry**

Jesus and Paul made it sound really easy. "Don't worry about tomorrow, God will take care of it. Don't let your heart be troubled. Just believe in

me." Paul reiterated those sentiments, "Don't worry about anything, just pray to God and you'll have peace." (Matt 6:25-34; John 14:1; Phil 4:6,7). It's really easy to tell someone not to worry or be afraid. It's not so easy to put it into action. Philippians 4 gives us a few secrets to this elusive thing called peace.

## The Fruit of Peace

Peace is something that passes understanding (Phil 4:7). The first thing we must know about peace is that it is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Peace is supposed to just happen automatically if someone is in Christ. Peace does not have to be worked up via any kind of human effort. A tree bears fruit naturally. It does not have to try to bear fruit or think positive in order to do it. If it is not bearing fruit, it is because something is hindering the natural progression of things. Perhaps it is not getting water, sunlight, maybe the soil is bad, or maybe there are vines or something interfering with it. Similarly we lose our peace when we allow fear and worry to infiltrate our minds. Once we get rid of the worry, peace is automatic. The bible lists a number of things that can potentially steal our peace and cause stress:

- 1) worry (Phil 4:6; Matt 6:25,28,31,34)
- 2) fear (2 Timothy 1:7)
- 3) overplanning for the future (Phil 4:6; Matt 6:25,28,31,34)
- 4) cares of the world (Matt 13:22)
- 5) unanswered prayer (James 4:1-3)
- 6) selfish ambition (James 4:1-3)

So the key is to eliminate those things.

## **The Secret to Peace**

The world offers new age techniques such as yoga and meditation to try to accomplish peace. At best these things can help you relax, but they don't give peace. And as we typically do, Christians try to disguise the world's ideologies in biblical terminology – they call it positive thinking. Many Christians try to find peace through a positive mental attitude, without even realizing that this principle finds its roots not in scripture, but in New Thought metaphysics. See my article on positive thinking for more on that. That's not the secret to peace.

Philippians 4 gives us the secret:

Eliminate worry, be thankful, pray – and you'll have the peace of God

Do the things you saw in me – and the God of peace will be with you.

The major reason we worry and stress out so much is because we try to take on too much on ourselves and we simply do not commit our ways and our plans to God (Proverbs 16:3; Psalms 37:5). Most of our stresses are caused because we simply do not pray.

Oh what peace we often forfeit

Oh what needless pain we bear

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer

Ultimately, every fear and worry can be traced to a lack of trust in God. If we totally trusted in God and were totally committed to his will, we would have no worry or fear.

In Philippians 4, Paul painted a picture of what a Christian life should look like, and as we look into that mirror, we often find that it does not reflect our lives. Paul said that we should emulate what we saw and heard in him. Well what exactly is that? ... considering that none of us are old enough to remember Paul. Luckily Paul gave us the answer right there in the following verses.

Philippians 4

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

We often quote verse 13 without reading the two verse before it. That scripture does NOT say that Christ will strengthen us to do whatever WE set our mind to as long as we concentrate hard enough and think good thoughts. It says that Christ strengthens us to endure any trial that God allows us to go through and not lose our peace. This is the picture that Paul painted of a Christian. A Christian should

- 1) not be overconcerned with earthly comforts
- 2) be thankful for what he/she has
- 3) trust God to supply his/her needs
- 4) be content with whatever outcome God decides is appropriate

This flies in the face of our materialistic western culture, but the further we are from this ideal, the less peace we will have. It is good to plan, but we must learn to commit our plans to him, and accept that his purposes will prevail. But many of us have our own agendas and God's will simply does not fit in. We live in a very competitive society. Western society does not teach us to be contented with what we have and to be thankful for it, but Philippians 4 does.

James 4

1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

James 4:1-3 says that many of our stresses and private wars happen because we covet things we do not or cannot have, and that God does not answer our prayers because of how selfish we are. We must learn to just make our requests known to God, leave it there and allow him to either give it to us or not. We must learn to be content and thankful for what God has given us, or we won't have true peace. Peace and an insatiable desire for material things cannot coexist.

Paul learned to be content in whatever situation he was. He learned to live in abundance and in lack. He learned to abound and to suffer need. He even learned how to go hungry. He told Timothy that a good soldier does not get entangled with the affairs of this life. Paul learned how to totally detach from this world.

At the beginning of this article, I related the story of Trinidadians who partied during a hurricane warning. They were able to remain calm because they did not believe that a hurricane was coming. Paul's peace was based on the fact that he did not care whether a hurricane came or not. God would give him the strength and grace to endure it either way. His peace was based on accepting things he could not change, and not devoting his entire life energy trying to avoid uncomfortable outcomes. This is the only way to truly have lasting peace – to be totally detached from the affairs of life.

Now this is much more easily said than done. We have possessions, families, responsibilities. So it is impossible to be totally detached. But there is a balance we must strive for. Most of the times we lose our peace because we want things that we do not or cannot have, and we won't rest until we get it. Ambition is good, but ambition can go too far. Some people don't have enough ambition, some people have too much. We must have the right balance. How do you know when ambition has gone too far? Very easy. Good ambition gives you a healthy zeal and zest for life. But when it starts to stress you out and take your peace, it has gone too far.

## **Peace with God**

Ephesians 2

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

So Paul talked about the peace of God and the God of peace. But all of this is meaningless if you don't have peace WITH God. This is a different kind of peace. The peace we discussed earlier refers to a calmness of mind. This kind of peace is the absence of war. You cannot have true peace of mind until you have peace with God. Jesus Christ died to reconcile us to God. Before this, we were at war with God and did not even know it. God considers anyone who is not in Christ an enemy. But Jesus is the mediator who came to make peace. Our sin has separated us from God, and he has offered his perfect righteousness on our behalf to appease the wrath of God. As a result of his righteousness and sacrifice, He can reconcile us to the Father and make peace between us and God. This is only offered to those who come to Christ. Without this peace with God, any other kind of peace is irrelevant.

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