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Here's Hope  
by Rev. Jerry Rea

### Jesus' Way is Hopeful

His way is *to love first*. He loved us before we loved Him. From our perspective, we often wait for someone to love us before we love them. That seldom works because of human nature. Human nature teaches us to love those who love us. We learn to do well to those from whom we expect to receive. We expect to be loved by those to whom we reach out. Jesus' way is so different. He taught us to love the unlovely. He taught us to love others in the same way He loved us. We love first, whether we are loved in return or not. We love like Jesus, who loved without any real reason to love. There is an endless domino cycle of hate in our world. We hate because others have hated us. We treat others like we've been treated. If they should not "come through," then it is as likely as not that we cut them off our list. That way of treating others is utterly hopeless. I like Jesus' way the best. He loves and starts His own domino cycle of love.

Jesus' cross was *voluntary*. He did not carry the cross because He had to. On the contrary, this is what He struggled with in the Garden of Gethsemane. He sweats blood over the issue of "not my will but thine." It is as if He purposefully leaned over and picked up the cross before Him. In His obedience to the Father's will, Jesus opened up a new way, but He also set a wonderful example. We ought to carry crosses because we want to obey God, not because we "have to." "Have to" Christianity is not Jesus Christianity. He went to the cross because of two loves. First, He loved God and lovingly obeyed the Father's will. Second, the Father loved us. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son. Love provided the way of the cross. Very often, we mutter and bristle over those tasks/ jobs that lie before us. We'd rather not go to work, but if we must, we will. We make every excuse for our unwillingness to simply obey God. That's not the attitude of Christ. His cross was voluntary. Simon was compelled to carry a cross. His "cross bearing" was not voluntary. Jesus carried the cross because He wanted to. If we could only follow that example, how hopeful that would be.

Here's a *third* way the Jesus Way is hopeful. Jesus operated out of a *different definition of "success."* We make repeated goals and repeated attempts at success. Is there anything wrong with that? Absolutely not. God has so made mankind that we follow our goals and resolutions to their conclusions. A problem arises when our view of "success" is just like the world's. Jesus' view of success had nothing to do with money or material things. Our view of success seems almost always to include financial wealth. Jesus' view of success had little to do with status. He never drew a salary for His ministry. We seem to always want others to look up to us. That (we feel) would be success. To win the esteem of our peers makes us feel that we have accomplished something. Fame and recognition are our goal. We make it a goal because we feel that if we have it, then we are a "success." Jesus, by contrast, was meek and lowly. He was born in barn, raised in the home of a carpenter, and died the lonely painful death of a criminal. He was not into status, or fame. He simply humbled Himself under God's hand and obeyed the Father. Many today feel that if they were people of status, then they could do great things for Jesus. That is the opposite of how we ought feel. We ought to obey God in servant fashion, and then (if God wills) He will raise us to a place of status. You don't have to have a degree to hang on the wall, or a television program to begin to serve Jesus. Our definition of success ends in the same selfish warring that is so common in our world. Jesus' view of success gives value and esteem to those of humble origins and lifestyles.

Jesus' way is hopeful. Our way is.... selfish and ends in failure and frustration and endless strife.

Jesus' Way is Hopeful!  
Jerry Rea