



## God's Way

### It's another New Year.

Let's make 2023 better than previous years by paying close attention to what God wants for us and from us; what He wants us to become, and what He wants us to do. His word tells us a lot of His will for us very clearly. (Extra "religious requirements" from other sources can be safely ignored—go with God's Word.) And, if we will receive it carefully and prayerfully, His Holy Spirit will show us anything more we need to know.

Make 2023  
a Year of  
Blessing

This message is based on the following Scripture passage, which is Paul's instruction for new believers in Christ. It also applies to those of us who have been Christians for decades, but who could probably benefit from some reminders.



**(Ephesians 4:25–32 NIV)**  
**Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.**

**"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.**

**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

Notice that there is nothing here that is surprising. It's all stuff we already know. Don't lie. Don't steal. If you get mad, get over it. Earn a living, and give to those in need. And so on.

Notice also that none of this is really hard—unless you choose to go your own way rather than behave as God wants you to. Remember, though, this other

Bible verse, which actually occurs twice: **There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (Prov. 14:12; 16:25 ESV)** Doing your own thing, rather than God's thing, is ultimately not a good idea.

Let's analyze the Scripture passage to see what it has for us.

**... put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.**

What happens when you tell a lie? You build a wall of secrecy between yourself and the one you've lied to, and you have to guard that wall so that the lie is not discovered. In effect, you've turned your neighbor into an enemy. In a sense, you've made it impossible for you to love your neighbor, as Jesus commanded that we do.

What about "little white lies," words that are meant for politeness, rather than deceit? Here you have to use judgment: which is better: blunt truth, polite falsehood, or saying nothing? I think truth, spoken with love, is generally better than the alternatives.

**"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.**

Since you can't prevent the sun from going down, you need to stop being angry before sunset. In other words, control your temper. Put away thoughts of retaliation. The devil wants you to hold on to your anger and let it grow and consume you, even to the point of violence, as we have seen so many times in our world in recent years. But Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and pray for those who mistreat us. When we do that, we're acting as God's children (Matt 5:44-45).



**Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.**

Here God's word is telling us two things: don't be a criminal (a thief, etc.) and don't be lazy—make yourself useful, as my mother used to say. What you earn by honest labor should be enough to meet

your needs, with something extra to share with the needy. Notice there is nothing here about finding a job that is easy, or one you really like. Sometimes dirty jobs are the only ones you can get. But if you trust God and are determined to do things His way, that will turn out to be the best path for your life.

***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.***

For emphasis: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth.* What is “unwholesome” talk? Profanity and vulgarity, obviously. Lies or anything deceitful, obviously. But also complaining and criticizing, putting people down, disrespecting others. Instead of bad-mouthing, we should speak *only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs*, including appropriate thankfulness, praise, and helpful advice—anything that *may benefit those who listen.*

***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.***

What grieves the Holy Spirit? From the few places in the Bible where this is mentioned, it seems to be rebellion; failure to appreciate what God has done for us, how He has saved us; instead, going our own way without regard for His guidance and His will for our lives. The Holy Spirit is sent to us to be our helper and our guide—if we won’t go where He is trying to lead us to, He is grieved.

***Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.***

Bitterness, anger, rage, brawling, slander, malice—none of these has any place in the life of a follower of Jesus. And you can easily add arrogance and all selfishness to that list as well. ***The thief [devil] comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I [Jesus] came that they [His followers] may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)***

Jesus tells us, ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30)*** Bitterness and the rest do not fit with who Jesus is. Instead, Jesus’ character exhibits the whole array of the fruit of the Spirit: ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22)***

Which brings us to the last sentence: ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

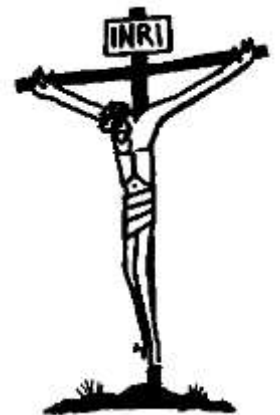
“Be kind” makes me think of the Golden Rule: ***“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 7:12)*** This is not Jesus giving us his personal advice; it is built into God’s purposes—in His laws, and in what He has said through His prophets.

“Be compassionate” brings this to mind: ***Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)*** Again this is “built in” to God’s program for our behavior—it’s “the law of Christ.”

And then “forgive”—often the hardest thing to do. But it’s a godly thing to do—it’s God’s way. He has forgiven you and me for all of our sins—the deliberate sins as well as the unintentional sins, including sins committed because of laziness or ignorance. He forgives our big sins and our little sins—all of our sins—because the blood of our Savior, Jesus, has atoned for them.

Why has God done this for us?

***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)*** God loved the world—you and me—and Jesus suffered and died, for you and me. Loving, and forgiving—this is God’s way.



***“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt. 6:14-15)*** Here God isn’t simply imposing a condition. Think of it this way: if your hand is closed into a fist, you can’t accept anything, but if you open your hand (forgive), then you can receive His forgiveness.

**REMEMBER—GOD LOVES YOU!**

May God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—bless you today and always, my brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, and give you His peace.

*Brother Roland*

# How to Keep Score

by Brother Roland

There is a story, certainly apocryphal, about President Andrew Jackson, whose reputation for toughness in the War of 1812 earned him the nickname “Old Hickory.”

On their wedding day [the story goes], after the ceremony, Jackson and his bride set out to drive some distance in a one-horse carriage. As they went along, the horse stumbled, causing the carriage to lurch forward. Giving the horse a baleful look, Jackson said, “That's *one*.” All was serene for a few miles, until the unlucky beast stumbled again. “That's *two*,” said Jackson. After another while, again the horse stumbled. Jackson pulled back on the reins, stopping the carriage. “That's *three*,” he said. He set the brake, then calmly stepped down, walked around in front of the horse, drew his pistol, and shot the poor animal between the eyes.

Mrs. Jackson gasped. “Andrew, honey, that's awful! How could you just shoot that poor horse? You shouldn't have done that.”

Holstering his pistol, Jackson looked his bride in the eye. “That's *one*,” he said.

The other day my bride did something that irked me, I forget what; and I jokingly said, half under my breath, “That's *one*.” Later, as I was thinking about our relationship, I realized that during our 3½ years of courtship and quite a few subsequent decades of marriage we have developed a wonderful way of keeping score. In all that time, no matter how many times each of us has managed to offend the other, we never seem to have gotten beyond “That's *one*.”

Someone, perhaps Dirty Harry, has popularized the saying, “I don't get mad, I get even.” God has a much better way: if you get mad, don't get even—get over it! Because by nature we are sinful, selfish creatures, we often offend each other, or take offense when none was intended. Forgiveness, given and received, is the soap and water that washes away the smelly, poisonous residue of every sin and resentment, making our relationship clean and healthy again.

Forgiveness, like love, is a decision that is ours to make. Let us make sure that the score, in our loving relationships, and particularly in our marriages, always stays tied at 0-0, so that each new offense can be counted with “That's *one*.”

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. --I Corinthians 13:4-8a (NIV)*

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If you have a Bible question or a question about the Christian life, send it to me at  
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I'll do my best to answer it, and your question may be helpful to someone else as well. God bless you! Please remember your prison chaplain or your pastor(s) in your prayers.

# God's Way

It starts with being born again, newly created in the likeness of Christ; then setting our course to walk in that newness of life; and finally being available and ready to be used by God every day for His divine purposes. All of that is our privilege and our calling. Enjoy the puzzle.

## Puzzle:

M O U T H S F O R S P E A K I N G H C U O D E R K W O P Z S A G O  
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W L D W B E T Y V R V B V M E B M W A S D U E K I S T O C I R U N  
O R J H S P I H S N O I T A L E R G N I V O L G T V U V D D N T S  
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O O Q C G Q T C V Z N H W T M N R B L Q E S I S L T L A Q V S N B  
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O V P K R U E F P F Z K B Q Q J I B N U J E S R B D P T A B H N W  
T S A O S X Q P J K E I V O I E S D K T T L E R U Y I U Z H I R M  
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O U N M X T P X N J Q Q T Z K E I I I Y N A C R N F H H O P F E E  
F S G G U O U E D Z D C N H V S B S F U D L W V I J S J Z N O L W  
E T G R M W H N Z E E O E A R S F O R H E A R I N G N E B J R R O  
P I W A A M N Y I P N U G F B F D O R S P B P S K E R C Y G G O P  
O N Q N U C N Y S T J R N H T N F H V Y C H B I R H A H W E I F T  
H A B D L O E E S T I B A H T S A P M O R F M O D E E R F X V Y I  
H S X P C Q R T T R E E E E D I A S P S E L F N N A B I Y X E R R  
A Y G A Z F D G O J O F S N L Y W P S M R S Y F A R T S V F N O I  
T Y W R L M L R Z C A B I T P S T E O R E E T O N T L T N Q E M P  
T X N E Z H I N D T H M H X O A N H C S O E H R L S Z I V M S E S  
N B S N I Y H H H M V A Z G O G L O N A A T H T Y F J A E T S M Y  
F O I T M O C E L P C Y N U I A R E S C E O N H O O Y N P P O X L  
L E G S F O R W A L K I N G N E S O H S K P W E E R I F D U F E O  
C J O O J S N Z W A S A E R E Z N E W Z E C I F M L B R D A S M H  
A W H O L E N E W L I F E Z N L R P T T T L X U G O P I B G I Y D  
N H D O L S N P W B J T U N Q S W O R P J X F T U V Y E W U N N R  
J D V A P E H T L A E H D N A H T G N E R T S U C I F N J P S O F  
X E X Y D N P Y T N Q C U X K E M Q B R I B Y R W N Z D S N G X D  
I S I J Z U P H A N D S F O R W O R K I N G B E L G O S D F G L K

## Words:

### He has given us:

OUR DAILY BREAD  
STRENGTH AND HEALTH  
LEGS FOR WALKING  
HANDS FOR WORKING  
EYES FOR SEEING  
EARS FOR HEARING  
MOUTHS FOR SPEAKING  
SENSES FOR ENJOYING  
MEMORY FOR LEARNING  
MINDS FOR UNDERSTANDING  
HEARTS FOR LOVING  
LIVES FOR LIVING

### He has given us:

LOVING RELATIONSHIPS  
- SPOUSE

- CHILDREN  
- PARENTS  
- SISTERS  
- BROTHERS  
- GRANDPARENTS  
- AUNTS AND UNCLES  
- COUSINS  
- CHRISTIAN FRIENDS  
- PASTORS  
- TEACHERS  
- MENTORS  
- NEIGHBORS

### He has given us:

THE BIBLE  
LESSONS LEARNED  
GRACE TO CHANGE

FREEDOM FROM PAST HABITS  
OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW  
CHALLENGES  
VISION FOR THE FUTURE  
WAYS TO SERVE OTHERS  
SELF-RESPECT

### He has given us:

THE FATHER'S LOVE  
FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST  
FORGIVENESS OF SINS  
SALVATION  
HOLY SPIRIT POWER  
HOPE FOR TOMORROW  
A WHOLE NEW LIFE  
PEACE WITH GOD  
AN ETERNAL HOME