



Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries ::::: Volume 7 ::::: Issue 2 :::::



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Jesus, the Kingdom, and Mutual Aid

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

“God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives. And God is with us if we are with them.”

—Bono;
54th National Prayer Breakfast

Many have misunderstood Jesus' words in Mark 10. They mistakenly think that He meant that if we give up something for Jesus in this life, we will somehow have more, materially, even in this life, than we could possibly imagine. This has led some to embrace what others have labeled a pseudo “prosperity gospel,” where if one follows Jesus one will have *the best life now!* This has created a source of frustration for others though, because this idea does not exactly match up with the experience of many who have lost everything to follow Jesus.

What was Jesus saying in this passage when he mentioned receiving many times as much, not just the age to come, but even in this age?

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10.29,30)

Did you catch what doesn't seem to fit with the “best life now” paradigm?

A hundred times back in this life . . . oh, along with persecutions!

Unlike us, today, in our individualistic, westernized, Americanized Christianity, the early church understood exactly what Jesus was saying. Look closely:

*All the believers were together and **HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON**. They sold property and possessions **TO GIVE TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED**. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They **BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND ATE TOGETHER** with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2.44-47)*

Jesus' followers in the first century formed tightly knit communities where people took care of each other. If I had lost my home for having followed Jesus, as I looked around the room there would have been ten other homes, possibly more, in the room that were mine to live in with my fellow brothers and sisters. If I had been rejected by a father or mother, as I looked around the room, I would have found possibly twenty fathers or mothers who would have stepped up to the plate to be a father or mother to me. This would have been the same with a brother or sister. And if I had lost my job for following Jesus, there were others in my Jesus community whom I could have leaned on till I got back on my feet and found other employment.

This is hard for many today to visualize because we are so individualistic in our contemporary culture. The first century followers of Jesus held all things in common. If someone lost something for following Jesus, within their own Jesus community there would be 10, 20, or 100 more at their disposal.

It is vital that we break out of our individualism to see this. Let me illustrate it this way.

How does one reconcile this teaching of Jesus with 401ks and other retirement accounts?

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6.19, 20)

Western individualism keeps us from truly being able to get our heads around this. Certainly, if we remain individualistic in our thinking and living, a retirement account is a must. But what if we were to actually begin to create communities of Jesus followers where we took care of each other

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Testimonies

In Response to the idea of RHM's Mutual Aid Network:

I would love to be a part of this! What a great way to be able to see the needs of others. Sign me up!

– K

Hey Herb, we just showed your two videos from the Good News Tour in 2009 with our Friday evening fellowship. It has been a few years since I watched it. Both of your presentations are very powerful. Just wanted to say thanks for loving God and being an inspiration to us! – SB



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again? I'm not saying, throw away your retirement account. What I am saying is, and it won't happen overnight, but rather, over time, let us begin creating communities of Jesus followers where we actually stop living individualistically and start living together in such a way that retirement accounts become obsolete, and where the above teachings of Jesus in Mark and Luke can actually come true. They will never be true as long as we do not also practice the community element of Christ's Kingdom.

Let's look at one objection that seems to surface every time the teachings of Jesus on economics begin to be taken seriously.

This sounds like socialism! No, this is something radically different than socialism.

Follow closely the words of Stuart Murray in this book *The Naked Anabaptist*: "However, the majority of Anabaptists did not practice "community of goods" but "mutual aid." This meant that they continued to own property and possessions, but made these available freely and gladly as they encountered others in need...economics and spirituality are connected for reasons of justice rather than charity. The backdrop to this conviction is a global economic order that is profoundly unjust, in which vast numbers are kept impoverished within a system that benefits and protects the powerful few. Charitable giving to offset some of the worst effects of this unjust system is laudable, but this can appease our consciences and distract us from working toward a more just world...mutual aid recognizes the prior claim of others in need to what we possess-as a matter of justice, rather than charity...mutual aid confronts the pervasive individualism of contemporary western societies. Nowhere is individualism more apparent than in the economic sphere. Our property is private. Our possessions belong to us and are jealously safeguarded. Our homes are our castles, well-defended against any intruders. Most of us do not disclose the level of our salaries or savings to

others, nor do we invite others to help us think through where we might live, what standard of living is appropriate, or how we might utilize our resources. It is quite unnecessary for our churches to conform to these cultural norms. If our churches are not institutions but communities, and if we recognize our need for each other's help in discerning and resisting the economic pressures of our culture, mutual aid will consist not just in sharing resources but also in working out together how to be disciples of Jesus in the area of economics. This economic practice will impact our spirituality. (Kindle Edition, p. 122)

Stop for a moment and dream with me. What a powerful testimony of what God is truly like! Remember, these teachings are not for everyone. This is simply how Jesus called HIS followers to begin living.

How do we begin making this transition from western individualism to Kingdom living?

Well, do not go out and burn your 401ks and ROTH IRAs. No, it's going to take time. Where we begin today is in starting to create community again among Jesus followers, where staunch individualism is abandoned and we begin viewing each other as brothers and sisters once again, and we are not simply passing through, but we are called to establish a new Kingdom where life is lived very differently, here, now, today. A perfect place to start this is in your own HeartGroup! (See the Esight on January 28, 2013 on our website for the HeartGroup application.)

At Renewed Heart Ministries, we are in the process of dreaming about something that may be called RHM Mutual Aid Network. We are still in the brainstorming phase, but what we are praying toward is a closed, online network where vetted needs can be posted from around the globe and each group can log in and view the needs of others and prayerfully consider whether their group can supply some needed help.

For instance, right now, I know of a dear friend in Missouri who is trained in paralegal and insurance sales who has been out of work for over 18 months. He

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has exhausted his own area and is willing to move anywhere where he can find some work. He even offered to turn wrenches at an oil-changing garage last week. He and his family are desperate and about to go over their own financial cliff. (Seriously, if you know of anyone hiring right now, email me and I will put you in touch with this family.)

But what if we had a community of Jesus followers desiring to aid one another when hard times hit and a network that could actually facilitate this kind of other-centered, self-sacrificial love?

If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3.17,18)

I have three children, Ali, Emarya and Christian, and I guarantee that if I were to see one of them on the street as an adult, I would not stop until I drug them home with me to have a warm meal, a dry place to sleep, and some help. The thought that I cannot escape this week is that each person out there tonight is an Ali, an Emarya, and a Christian to God. I can't save the world, but I must let this confront me and prayerfully ask Jesus, what percentage of this world's pain and need DOES He want me to take responsibility for?

The Kingdom Jesus came to establish is centered on one thing: manifesting the beauty of God's Character. It's much more than simply preaching (or listening to) a sermon. It's a way of life. It's about humbly and lovingly serving the world the way Jesus did. It's about loving the world the way Jesus did. It's not so much about going to church, as it is about being the church.



MINISTRY UPDATE

Summersville, WV January 25,26

Summersville is only an hour away from Lewisburg, and since it was my third weekend of travel in January, I was thankful for that. I have shared multiple series of events with the group in Summersville in past, and so I knew it was going to be an enjoyable weekend — but I'd forgotten just how enjoyable it can be.

What I appreciate most about this group is that they are probably the most forward-thinking group I've encountered here in West Virginia. I'm originally from this state, so I can say this. It's refreshing to spend a weekend with those who understand that following Jesus isn't static — it's a movement, a journey, a process we are all in. And every day, following Jesus and His teachings about the Kingdom comes to mean more and more to us than it did the day before.

This group is very familiar with Renewed Heart Ministries' passion for sharing God's radical character of love as seen through the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus. We were able to build on previously shared concepts in a way

that is rare for most groups we are visiting for the first time. Beginning on Friday night, we looked at what it means for us today, in our culture, not simply to be "Christians," but to be those who are endeavoring to return to the actual teachings of Jesus and what He described His kingdom to be all about. We discussed the beautiful inclusivity of Jesus toward the marginalized, in contrast to most of the religious leaders of His day, who saw themselves as morally superior to such people. (When one realizes how central this was to the teachings of Jesus, it truly does revolutionize one's picture of God, and how we relate to all others.) In the three presentations that followed over the weekend, we looked at the tragedy of Sandy Hook, and how all the major world religions of today respond to tragedies of this magnitude. We looked at the Hindu response, the Buddhist response, the Muslim response, and then the "Christian" response (which, historically, tends simply to echo other typical religious responses). Then, lastly, we looked at how Jesus responded to human suffering in His day. The contrast was breathtaking. We then took time to look at the Cross through the Christus Victor



(or “Great Controversy” or “Cosmic Conflict,” for those who are familiar with that language) paradigm, with special emphasis on how Jesus never looked at people as transgressors in need of punishment but as victims in need of a Savior. Then, when one remembers that Jesus was emphatic that if anyone had seen Him, they had seen the Father too — well, this is a game-changer. It redefines everything, including the suffering and death of Jesus. So far from Jesus being a whipping boy to appease an angry God’s need to punish somebody, Jesus’s suffering and death were God’s nonviolent response to and victory over His Enemy (and ours too)! Long live Christ the victorious! This presentation too was a beautiful time for all who participated.

Finally, we looked at the intrinsic value and the Kingdom basis, within the teachings of Jesus, of “being the church” very differently from the way in which much of what we do is currently done. We looked at how we can begin transitioning from pastor/teacher-led worship services to the open, mutually participatory nature of the gatherings of the New Testament/early church. What I love about this forward-thinking group in Summersville is that immediately after this presentation, I was mobbed with questions about how to begin this transition right now! Much

was said about how to transition respectfully and gradually. So many are very heavily invested in “being the church” very differently from how Jesus taught that the transition must be slow, healthy, and respectful. But this group in Summersville was eager to begin. I’ve already got word from a group meeting midweek in New Testament/Early Church style that reflects the beauty of who God is more authentically. Many, seeing what the New Testament actually teaches on this topic, and how it fits hand-in-glove with the truth of the Character of God that we, as Jesus followers, are to be putting on display for the world around us, simply responded with, “Well, let’s start this next week!”

I was so encouraged.

I received this too, right after the weekend, through our website:

“Just heard Herb Montgomery speak at Summersville, WV and it opened my heart and mind to so much! Words cannot explain what my heart is feeling. I am so blessed to have been there as his message was exactly what the doctor (God) ordered! Thank you!”

For those of you who were partnering with us in prayer for this weekend, thank you. We could not do what we do without your support.

Wherever this finds you today, remember, you are NOT just passing through. It’s not about “Heaven.” According to the example of Jesus, it’s about life, here, now, today. As followers of Jesus, we are called to love subversively until a world in which love reigns is the only world that remains. In the words of Brian Zahnd, “Christ is not something that will nicely accommodate your cherished assumptions. Christ is the most radical thing that has ever happened to this world. To see Christ as Christ, the King of the Jews who is now King of the World — [it] is to realize that Caesar is not Lord, Pharaoh is not Lord, but Jesus is Lord. Jesus cannot be owned or incorporated or subsumed into any other nation — Not Babylon, not Egypt, not Rome, not Russia, not England, not America. Jesus is building his own nation (kingdom) — it’s the Kingdom of God. Christ does not come to endorse any nation — he comes to set up his own. But the nations of the world — all of them! — will resist this.”

It’s a Kingdom of Love, remember. So today, go out and love someone, with no interest of what’s in it for yourself! Live the life of love (Eph. 5.1, 2). Love like Christ, and go, subversively — enlarge His mustard-seed Kingdom. Vive la Revolution!

Schedule

JANUARY 11-13, 2013

Naperville Adventist Church,
Naperville, IL
708.514.5723

JANUARY 18-20, 2013

Raymond Adventist Church
Franksville, WI
262.878.5133

JANUARY 25-27, 2013

Summersville Adventist Church
Summersville, WV
304.872.6958

FEBRUARY 8-10, 2013

Battleford Adventist Church
North Battleford, SK, CAN
306.445.9096

FEBRUARY 22 - MARCH 2, 2013

Paradise Adventist Church
Paradise, CA
530.877.4454

MARCH 8-16, 2013

Raymond Adventist Church
Franksville, WI
262.878.5133

APRIL 8-12, 2013

Shenandoah Valley Academy
New Market, VA
540.740.3161

HeartGroups Testimonies

We decided to change our group time to Saturday afternoon instead of Friday evening. I have always had reservations about having an evening weekday gathering because I know people are so tired after a long day of work and they just want to stay home and crash. It is also difficult for families with young children to come out in the evening. (And our older one sometimes find it difficult to stay awake.)

Our last meeting was our first at this new time. There were just a few us. A burden was expressed that we needed to have a special prayer time asking God to bless our efforts and bring to our group those that needed to be there. So that is what we did, praying that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, acknowledging the headship of Jesus over our group, and asking HIM to lead and grow us. Be careful what you pray for!

In one week we have had 5 new people join our group, one person come back, and another three potential people who may join us next week!!! That would make a total of 9 new people which would essentially double our number in just 2 weeks.

I am overwhelmed by how God is so clearly working. What amazes me is the diversity of our group. We have been adamant that we do not want this to be a "special interest" group, but rather a group made up of followers of Jesus and those who want to get to know Jesus.

I was thrilled to receive a phone call this week from two of our new members whom we hadn't seen in a couple weeks, asking if they could still come. Of course! They were joyfully received by the group and as the afternoon ensued, they visibly began to relax and participate. They have a LOT of questions about God, and Christianity in general.

Another young couple with two small children have joined us. (We now have the beautiful challenge of figuring what to do with the children!) They were both atheists who had no place for God in their lives until their recent conversion. We felt moved by God to invite them to join our group so that as new "babes" in Jesus they could have a strong support group to mentor them. We were pleasantly surprised when they appeared at our doorstep yesterday!



Quotable Quotes

"Adopting Jesus' own definition of the Gospel is vital if we are ever to begin seeing God the way Jesus did."

—Herb Montgomery
(eSight dated January 14, 2013;
www.renewedheartministries.com)

We also have a couple struggling with Cancer who has also decided to join. Another of our group is a widower, and was able to engulf them with love, compassion, and encouragement, as he has “been there and done that.” It was very special.

Another of our group also had the opportunity to share many lengthy, interesting, spiritual conversations with a friend at work for months now – all instigated by this friend. This friend has recently gone through something very painful is just a hurting, searching individual. (Our member has always just tried to be a friend and good listener to this man.) Again, he is a true seeker but is having difficulty putting all the puzzle pieces together. He has so many questions. He was raised in a staunch Catholic church and just wasn’t satisfied with the mechanical rote worship service. So he left the Catholic church and joined a non-denominational mega church.

Last week, these two stayed up until midnight talking about deep spiritual things. At the end of their conversation the friend from work said, “This is what I wish church was like.” He then proceeded to share how dissatisfied he is with the mega church as well. He feels like it is nothing more than entertainment. Every week he feels like he has attended a nice music concert and show, but not gained anything spiritually. He admitted that he is craving an environment where he can

freely share and ask questions and feel that somebody really cares about him. Wow! Was that an open door or what? Our HeartGroup member assured him that that is exactly what church is meant to be and has invited him to attend our organic church. He has gone to visit his family over the holidays but we are fervently praying for him that he will be able to join us next week and truly experience what it feels like to belong to the family of God and be part of a caring community of believers.

I believe our group is one that he can relate to. One of our original couples have also come out of a staunch Catholic background. And one of our group is still a practicing Catholic but firm believer in righteousness by faith and just infectiously enthusiastic about his love for Jesus. Two of our group come from a totally atheistic background and so understand the questioning and grappling with the things of God. I am praying that between them all they might be able to minister to our him in a special way.

So please pray for him, that if he needs to be part of our group God will impress his hearts to join us.

My sister is getting ready to start up a new HeartGroup in her area as well. Please keep her in your prayers. Happy New Year and may God truly bless us all as we seek to share His love with the world around us this coming year.



“Today the God of Christianity is portrayed as one who blesses the believers and threatens punishment on all unbelievers. By contrast, Jesus portrayed God as one who blesses “the evil and the good”, and treats both “the righteous and the unrighteous” with the same love, blessing, and self-sacrificial, other-centered service. (Matthew 5.44,45; Luke 6 35,36) This a.m. the contrast is especially pressed home to me.”

– From Herb’s Twitter Feed





Testimonies

This E-Sight not only reduced me to tears of gratitude, it has gotten me re-writing song lyrics in my head when I've got my praise music on. <http://www.renewedheartministries.com/Esights/02-12-2012> — *SD*

I just discovered HeartGroups and am ecstatic. This concept of mutual open sharing to reflect and experience the life of the Godhead SO resonates with me. I am eager to listen to the rest of the podcast series and fund a group in my area. Thank you for venturing down this extremely relevant aspect of Christianity. — *NS*

Thank you for coming to Oklahoma! Our church used what they learned there and had meetings in the park. Praise God we all learned a lot! — *RS*

We saw God's leading in our Heart-Group meeting tonight like never before! Our members can hardly wait until next week! We worshiped and shared for almost 3 hours. It was amazing how fast the time went... We all left with a renewed desire to share the Good News and to be partners with Jesus in building the Kingdom — *DJ*

Thanks again for the wonderful, uplifting and Christ-centered weekend, Herb. It was an awesome blessing. — *JS*

I have just been introduced to you by a Facebook friend, Oh my, you are fantastic to listen to, a blessing to me how you have explained God again in my life. — *NS*

Featured Presentation



Many have written in and asked for Herb to explain how the Christus Victor (or Great Controversy) paradigm reinterprets the meaning of Christ's death. Much more reluctant to debate atonement theories, Herb, this month, would rather share a presentation that simply shares how Jesus Himself understood the purpose of His own suffering and dying. Why did Jesus feel His

own death was part of God's plan, a necessity in order to reach the accomplishment for which He had come? And what does it reveal about Jesus' own picture of the Father contrasted to our own? It is in an endeavor to help others understand more clearly the death of Jesus from within the headspace of Jesus Himself and to encounter God's character of radically self-sacrificial love that we are happy to offer this month's free, featured presentation, *The Victory of Christ*.

Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge. Jesus commanded, "Freely you have received, freely give." We at RHM take this command very seriously. Philosophically we have a hard time charging money to people for things God has given us for free.

In order to do this, we are entirely dependent on the contributions of our supporters. If you would like to make a one-time gift or offer monthly support, please send your contributions to the following address:

**Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901**

Contributions can also be made online at: www.renewedheartministries.com

*All donations receive a tax-deductible receipt.

Be sure to check out RHM's free resources at: www.renewedheartministries.com