



# Awakenings

*"Only by love is love awakened."*

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::::: Volume 9 :::::: Issue 5 ::::::



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Renewed Heart Ministries  
P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901  
Phone: 304.520.0030  
Email: [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com)

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@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery





## The Last Shall Be the Same as the First and the First the Same as the Last

by Herb Montgomery

### Quotable Quotes

*"Nothing has contributed so much to the obscuring of Christian truth in the eyes of the heathen, and has hindered so much the diffusion of Christianity through the world, as the disregard of this command [nonviolence] by men calling themselves Christians, and the permission of war and violence to Christians."*

– Leo Tolstoy  
*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*

***"But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*** (Matthew 20:13-16)

I want to begin by asking you to experiment with me. Let's, for the sake of experimentation, just for a bit, NOT spiritualize everything Jesus said about money and economics. Not spiritualizing Jesus' teachings on money enable us to gain deep insights into Jesus' new alternate society that we are simply prevented from seeing when we spiritualize it all.

I also want to define the word *denounce*. To denounce means to "publicly declare to be wrong or evil" (*New Oxford American Dictionary*); its synonyms include condemn, criticize, attack, censure, decry, revile, vilify, discredit, damn, reject, proscribe, malign, rail against, lay into, formally castigate, expose, betray, inform on, incriminate, implicate, cite, name, and accuse (*Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*). A denouncement can also be a public accusation or reporting (*Wikipedia*).

In Matthew 11:20, this version of the Jesus story tells us that *"Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed."* What did this look like? What form did Jesus' denouncements take? They come to us in the same form as the denouncements of the Old Testament prophets. They come in the pronouncement of a "woe." In the very next verse (Matthew 11:21) we find *"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!"* Eerdmans Dictionary states that *"In the New Testament 'Woe' functions as prophetic denunciation."* Jesus is standing in his prophetic lineage in his use of language here.

Yet what I want us to contemplate this week is another denouncement Jesus made. This denouncement is made in Luke's Jesus story, chapter 6:

***"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry."***

*Woe to you who laugh now [as opposed to mourn over the present social order], for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."* (Luke 6:24-26)

Let's back up and look at the big picture. Jesus had just pronounced a blessing (the opposite of a denouncement) on the opposite group. Remember, Jesus is not saying that there is something "righteous" about being poor. He is saying that for those whom the present social order has left poor, hungry and mourning, the changes Jesus had come to make were especially favorable. The alternate human society Jesus was inviting all to join would be a blessing for those who were poor under the present system and, at a bare minimum, be problematic for those benefiting from the present system. But we will talk about that in a moment. Let's look at the two groups first.

***"Looking at his disciples, he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now [as a result of the present system], for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.'" (Luke 6:20-22)***

***"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep."*** (Luke 6:24-25)

It's not because of its co-opted pagan roots of celebrating fertility and the rebirth of spring, though I genuinely appreciate both. It's because this is the one time Christianity remembers, though I think many have forgotten what it means, why Christianity, as a revolution (as opposed to a religion) came into being.

Jesus is doing two things. First, yes, he is proclaiming that the new social order he is teaching is good news for those who are presently in the position of being "last" and at least problematic for those who were presently "first," benefitting from the present system. Second, he is indicting the rich. There is no way around it. To understand the logic of this, this planet and its resources are not infinite. It provides enough for every person's needs, Gandhi once said, but not every person's

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greed. I understand the “opulence” for everyone argument, but the resources of this earth simply do not work that way. If someone is hoarding more than he or she needs, someone else is going without what he or she needs. (Think of the truth of the Hebrew manna story; everyone had what he or she needed because those who “gathered much” shared with those who “gathered little.”) To say that Jesus was putting forth an alternate society seeking the equal distribution of earth’s resources so that each person could have what he or she needed was *good news* to the poor.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim **good news to the poor.**”* (Luke 4:18)

What does this mean? At minimum, it means that if our Jesus is not first and foremost systemic good news for the poor, we have to at least wonder if our Jesus is the same Jesus as the one in the story.

Jesus’ new economic teachings also have something to say about debts that had been incurred under the present system. All debts are to be cancelled! This, too, is good news to the debtors and problematic for creditors. But remember, Jesus’ goal is equality, not just in opportunity, but in result. What Jesus is announcing is the never-practiced Hebrew tradition of “Jubilee,” during which all debts were to be forgiven.

*“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”* (Matthew 6:12)

This was hard news for those economically benefiting from the present system.

*“Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”* (Luke 18:25)

The idea that there was a gate called a “needle” that camels had to get down on their knees to enter and was difficult to enter but not impossible has long been debunked by scholars. That’s a made-up story. What Jesus is saying is that it’s impossible for the rich to enter Jesus’ new alternative society here on earth because fundamental to this new society’s core is a sharing of one’s superfluous riches with those who have less. At its core, Jesus’ new alternate society is a divestment of and a redistribution of the riches of the dominant class with the aim of equality.

Notice how this played out in the

Corinthian church:

*“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is **EQUALITY.**”* (2 Corinthians 8:13–14)

*“The reason the rich cannot enter is not an imposed reason but an intrinsic one. The first step for the rich in following Jesus is a divestment of their riches. It’s making the rich un-rich. It’s alleviating the poverty of the poor through sharing those riches, not, as some claim, making all people poor but equal. Jesus taught the rich, “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* (Matthew 19:21)

This was not an isolated occurrence only privately applied to this specific person. This was a staple of Jesus’ words to all who were rich:

*“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock (Jesus’ alternate society), for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* — (Luke 12:31–34)

This is exactly why the very first expression of following Jesus in the book of Acts was manifested in Jesus-followers’ selling their properties and giving to anyone who was

in need.

*“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. **They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.**”* (Acts 2:41–45)

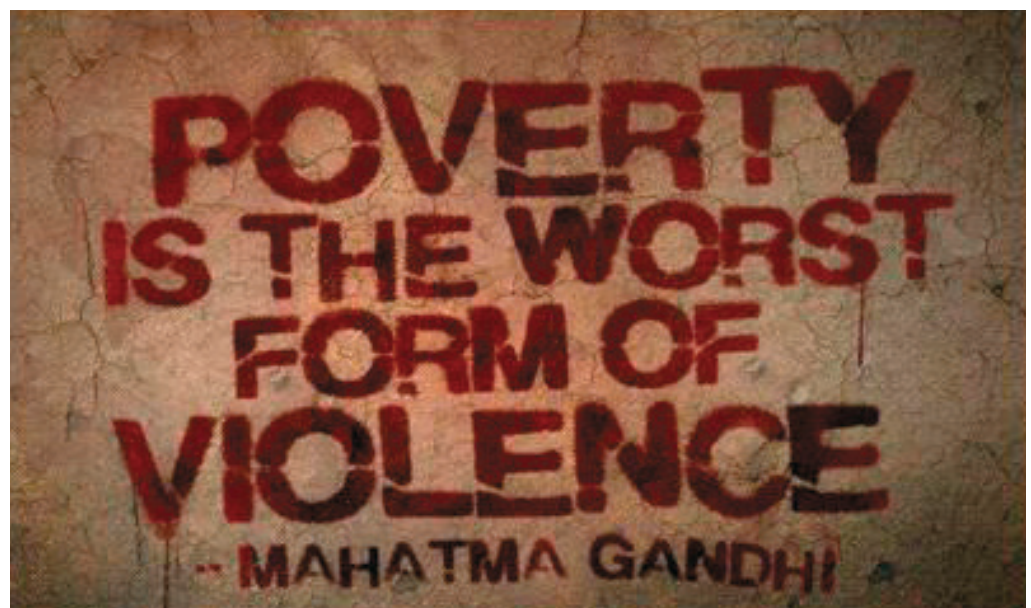
When the wealthy young man heard this, it was too much. *“He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven [new alternative society, here, now].”* (Matthew 19:22–23)

I want to juxtapose this statement from Jesus, that it is “hard” for those with wealth to enter into Jesus’ beautiful alternative community, with the statement of Matthew’s Jesus just eight chapters earlier:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28–30)

What can’t be missed is that Jesus is saying if the present system has caused you to not be at ease and not be surrounded by riches but to be “weary,” “heavy laden,” and in need of “rest,” you will find entering Jesus’ alternate society “easy.” It is a blessing! But if you are one presently

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# MINISTRY UPDATE

## The Jesus Dialogue - 2015

Edmond, Oklahoma

March 27 - April 4

During the transition of March into April this year, I had the privilege of sharing our newly updated and renovated series entitled The Jesus Dialogue in Edmond, Oklahoma. Never have I been more convinced that what we should be doing as Jesus' followers is simply lifting up His teachings. This alone is sufficient. There is an unmatched attractive power in the beauty of what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John's Jesus taught. Compassion, Restorative Justice, Enemy Forgiveness, Liberation for the Poor, Inclusivity of the religiously (and even politically) Marginalized, all of these themes found in the Jesus story have the power to transform our world.

Leo Tolstoy once wrote, *"The proposition that we ought not do unto others as we would not they should do unto us, did not need to be proved by miracles and needed no exercise of faith, because this proposition is in itself convincing..."*

In John 7:17, Jesus states that the proof of the verity of his teachings is not in outward supernatural demonstrations, but simply in the experimental practice of those very teachings themselves. If someone will endeavor to follow those teachings, those teaching themselves will bear witness to how genuinely true they are. The challenge is finding (even among many Christians these days) a group that is willing to give them an actual try. G.K. Chesterton is famous for saying that the history of Christianity does not *"prove that the teachings of Jesus have been tried and found wanting, but that the teachings of Jesus have been found difficult and left untried."* They are found to be easy only for those for



whom the present social arrangements leaven the "weary and heavy laden." For those benefitting from the present arrangement, the teachings found in the Jesus story, at times, are at best very difficult (see Matthew 11:28-30 cf. Matthew 19:23).

I counted them all. Over the course of nine days, I gave 27 presentations to three separate audiences. I don't know what I was thinking. At the end, I was exhausted.

Was it worth it? Absolutely!

I made a dear friend of someone who only attended the series one evening, but with whom I had the chance to sit down twice outside of the meetings. He and I quickly connected and I'll actually be featuring an article from him in May's Newsletter from RHM. Be on the look out for it; I'm sure it will encourage you as it did me.

On the last day of the series, a mother came to me in tears. Her son, whom she had told me about earlier in the week, had been moved, much like Tolstoy's comments above indicate. Her son was still expressing his deep concerns about and objections to contemporary Christianity, but now, he was also expressing his desire to follow the Jesus he had encountered that past week.

I was encouraged by those I met and by the team I had the privilege of working with at this church. I was so encouraged by the work of healing and restoration

that I see those presently following Jesus already engaged in. I also had the chance to visit *Feed the Children* while I was in Edmond. I was super impressed with what I saw that organization doing.

I had so many good experiences with those I had the privilege of meeting, and I can't thank each of you enough for letting me into your lives and sharing with me all that was most dear to you. I so love what I encountered in each of you.

If you would like to hear more about what this updated series is all about, you can download presentations from our website: [renewedheartministries.com/presentation/The-Jesus-Dialogue](http://renewedheartministries.com/presentation/The-Jesus-Dialogue).

I'll close with a note I received on my last day in Edmond.

*"There are times in the ministry of Jesus that His total audience was one. This week, I believe I am that one. Thank you for letting the love of Jesus shine through you."*

To each of you who support Renewed Heart Ministries, whether financially or otherwise, thank YOU! We could not do what we do without you. This series was another success, both in the here and now, and toward the new Heaven and new Earth.

Let's keep lifting up Jesus together, until the only world that remains is a world where Love reigns.

I love each of you. Thank you for supporting us. Thank you for making events like this one possible.

POVERTY

### *The Last Shall Be... cont'd from page 3*

benefiting from the current system, Jesus unmistakably states that you're going to have a harder time embracing Jesus' teaching on economics. Entering into this alternate society centered in the teachings of Jesus is impossible on your own and only possible with God (see Matthew 19:26).

Again, why is it so "hard?" It is hard because Jesus is not selling the American definition of "equality." Jesus is not simply offering equality as a matter of "opportunity." Jesus is calling for a system which creates equality in results as well.

This is the point in the story at which Jesus tells of the workers who arrived at the end of the day but were paid the same as those who had been there all day:

*"But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."* (Matthew 20:13-16)

This, again, was good news to the last. It was at least problematic for those who were first.

Gandhi is one of the many in history who have experimented with Jesus' teachings on equal pay. There are two books that Gandhi states had a bigger effect on his life and thinking than any other books he read. The first was Leo Tolstoy's, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. The second was John Ruskin's, *Unto The Last*. Gandhi, in his autobiography, states that this second book crystalized for him three truths. In the words of Gandhi himself:

1. The good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right to earn their livelihoods from their work.
3. The life of labor, e.g., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.

Gandhi embarked, from Ruskin's book (the title of which was taken from our featured text this week: *"I desire to give unto the last the same as I give to the first"*), on an experiment called the Phoenix Project, in which everyone was paid the same amount

Earth provides  
enough to satisfy  
every man's need,  
but not every  
man's greed.

—Gandhi

Illustration by *Brittany Jackson*



regardless of the job they did. The sense of community and mission this produced is breathtaking if one takes the time to read about it. Everyone worked for the mission; they looked at each other as equals.

We all know how Hasbro's Monopoly game ends. Gehenna, in the Old Testament prophet's sense, may be unavoidable. Jesus is offering a way to life—an alternate, beautiful community.

There are two narratives we can live by:

Narrative 1: Scarcity – Anxiety – Competitive Accumulation – Stockpiling/ Hoarding – Violence

Narrative 2: Abundance – Confidence – Cooperative Sharing – Generosity – Peace

Narrative 1 involves believing that there is not enough for everyone's needs and allowing the anxiety that belief produces to drive you to a life of accumulating stockpiles that you must protect with violence. The other narrative involves believing that there actually is enough for everyone's needs to be met if we share and cooperate. We can subscribe to a narrative of confidence rather than anxiety, of generosity rather than hoarding. And rather than producing stockpiles one needs to protect with violence, a shared mutuality that produces peace arises.

The least we can do is begin to be honest about our narratives.

I'll close this week with the words of Leo Tolstoy.

*"I do not say that if you are a landowner you are bound to give up your lands immediately*

*to the poor; if a capitalist or manufacturer, your money to your workpeople; or that if you are Tzar, minister, official, judge, or general, you are bound to renounce immediately the advantages of your position; or if a soldier, on whom all the system of violence is based, to refuse immediately to obey in spite of all the dangers of insubordination.*

*If you do so, you will be doing the best thing possible. But it may happen, and it is most likely, that you will not have the strength to do so. You have relations, a family, subordinates and superiors; you are under an influence so powerful that you cannot shake it off; but you can always recognize the truth and refuse to tell a lie about it. You need not declare that you are remaining a landowner, manufacturer, merchant, artist, or writer because it is useful to mankind; that you are governor, prosecutor, or Tzar, not because it is agreeable to you, because you are used to it, but for the public good; that you continue to be a soldier, not from fear of punishment, but because you consider the army necessary to society. You can always avoid lying in this way to yourself and to others, and you ought to do so; because the one aim of your life ought to be to purify yourself from falsehood and to confess the truth. And you need only do that and your situation will change directly of itself.*

*There is one thing, and only one thing, in which it is granted to you to be free in life, all else being beyond your power: that is to recognize and profess the truth."*

The Kingdom of God Is Within You

cont'd on page 6



# HeartGroups:

## Anatomy of an Open Meeting: Part 4 of 5

### Part 4: The Danger of Creating Heroes and Experts

by Keith Giles

(For the entire series, please see *Anatomy of an Open Meeting* Parts 1-5 at: [www.rhmheartgroups.com](http://www.rhmheartgroups.com))

I've written about this before on my blog and shared my concerns about elevating leaders within the House Church/Organic Church movement to become our own versions of "Pastors" and "Bishops". If we do that we've now become as guilty as the rest of the traditional church we left behind in order to pursue Christ as our only Head.

This is a two way street, by the way. It can be the Leader who seeks the fame and the name, or it can be the people who seek after a guru who will tell them what to believe and how to behave. Or, it can be a little of both.

As someone whose personal sin is Pride, I have to admit that I'm very aware of this tendency in myself and I work very hard to sit in the background of our own church family and not take the Lord's place in the Body. I used to limit myself to only two "soap box moments" every meeting. Then my goal was to try not to share a comment on what every person shared during the meeting (which created a sort of conversational ping-pong where someone would share and then I would comment and then another person would share and then I would comment again, etc.). Now my goal is to keep silent unless the Lord



really prompts me to share something. Otherwise, I sit quietly and I listen.

I know that sometimes people who read my blog or my books will visit our house church and they'll expect that I'll have some cool teaching to share every time. But that's not what happens. If anything, I'll rarely talk at all unless the Lord has given me something to teach or to share.

I'll never forget when one brother visited our group for the first time after reading my blog. He came on a Thursday evening and after I played the guitar during the shared worship time, I got up and left the room. He told me later that he thought it was very weird that I would do that, but the group didn't miss a beat and people were sharing and teaching and praying for one another spontaneously without me in the room.

Eventually he did notice that I had returned to the room when I spoke up and shared something, but until that moment he was oblivious to my presence, which is sort of the point, really.

My goal is really to encourage everyone else to share. I really want to hear what my two teenage boys have to say. I want to hear from those quiet wives who

never speak out. I want hear what that five year old boy has to say about Jesus. Those are always the most profound things, really. I've learned so much from the most unlikely sources. It's amazing, really.

This kind of thing is a movement of God. No man can take credit for this.

When I hear from people all over the nation, and even the world, that God is leading them in this same New Testament model of "being Church" it excites me. Because we're not moving in this direction because we read a blog or a book or attended a conference. Every one I've spoken to shares their story about how God did this to them. God called them to step outside the traditional model of Church and they obeyed Him and followed His leading, even at a great cost – usually friendships, or salaries, or the respect of others, etc. But when I hear those testimonies I rejoice because I know that God is purifying His Bride and He's doing something marvelous that no man can dare take credit for.

In our final installment we'll look at a few other things a leader in an open meeting might be called upon to do.

*The Last Shall Be... cont'd from page 3*

## HeartGroup Application

This week for our HeartGroup Application, I want to recommend to you the book *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* by Leo Tolstoy. You can download a copy free of charge at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

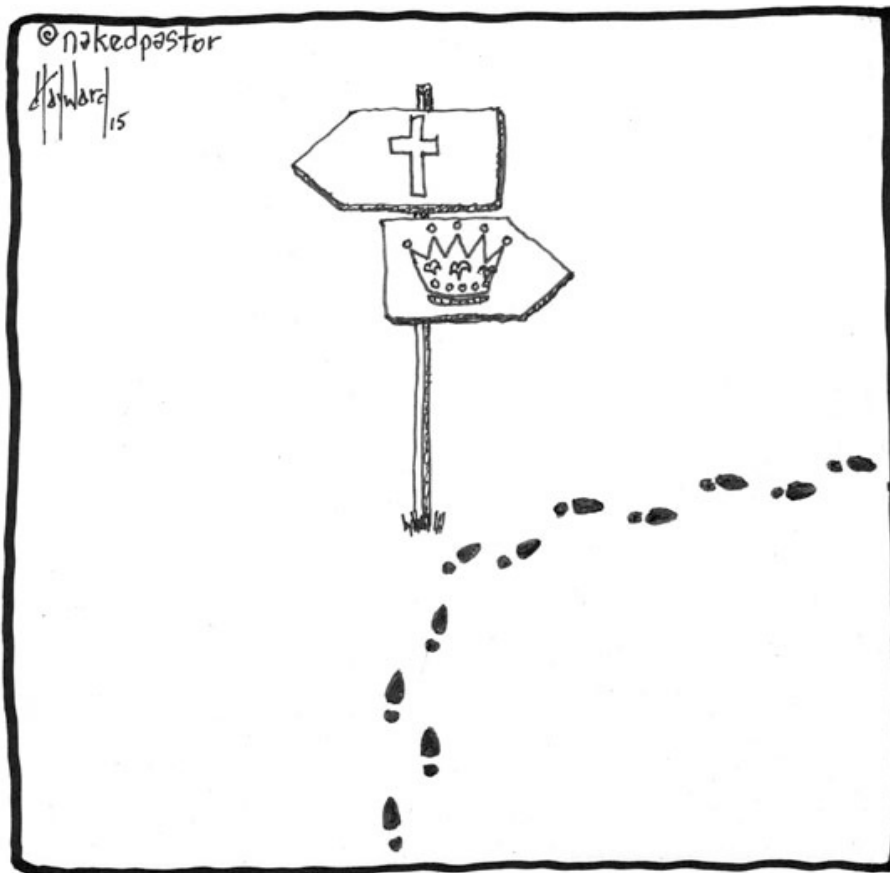
1. Dedicate some time each day to reading and contemplating what you are reading.

2. Journal your thoughts, feelings, questions, and insights.
3. Spend some time in your HeartGroup this upcoming week discussing what you are reading. In other words, process some of what you're reading out loud with others. Jesus' teachings were never meant to be understood or applied in isolation but with "one another."

Together we can make a difference.  
Together we can learn to recognize and

participate in Jesus' alternate society, the beloved and beautiful community, centered around a shared table. It is a beautiful community.

Keep living in love until the only world that remains is a world where Love reigns. ■



## Quotable Quotes

*"The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity by contributing to the establishment of the kingdom of God, which can only be done by the recognition and profession of the truth by every man."*

– Leo Tolstoy  
*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*

*"You are not making a gift of your possession to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his."*

– Ambrose Of Milan;  
*Ambrose of Milan, 340-397*

*"Stop asking God to bless what you are doing and get involved in what God is already doing, because it's already blessed."*

– Bono;  
*Keynote Address at the 54th National Prayer Breakfast; February 2, 2006*

## RHM's FREE Podcasts, Via The Internet, Are Going all Around The World!

We, at RHM, are receiving some profound feedback from all across the globe from those who are listening to our weekly podcasts via the internet. These are proving to be one of RHM's most effective (as well as efficient) means of sharing. Not everyone can attend one our seminars. Herb can only travel to so many churches every year, but the resource (both written and audio) that are right now being taken advantage of by folks, world wide, is astounding!

Here is just a sampling of the feedback we are receiving:

*"It has become a welcome part of my D.C. commute!" - D.C. Diplomat*

*"I love Herb and the way he puts things and ideas into a perspective you really haven't heard before. It's really quite eye opening and refreshing." - Manning08*

*"These podcasts teach me about God's extravagant love like no other teachings ever has. So thankful!!!" - Hbound Forever*

Please consider supporting RHM's weekly podcasts as we, together, continue to share Jesus teachings in meaningful and effective ways  
Mark your donation "Podcasts."





# Featured Presentation

This month, we would like to feature a presentation that is part of our recently updated Jesus Dialogue series entitled *All Things In Common*. The Prophets of the Old Testament did not refer to helping the poor as "Charity," they called it—"Justice." In Jesus' teachings we are not presented with band-aid solutions that



preserve the broken system, but with subversive systemic change. Gene Robinson is famous for saying, *"It is one thing to pull people out of the river, but at some point someone has to walk upstream and find out who is throwing them in."* Jesus called it "the Kingdom." Gandhi called it "an alternative society." Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to it as "the beloved community." This month it is our hope that this presentation will encourage as well as challenge us as we encounter together what Jesus called *"good news to the poor."* (Luke 4:18) —*All Things In Common* by Herb Montgomery.

Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge. Jesus instructed us, "Freely you have received, freely give." We at RHM take this command very seriously. Philosophically we have a difficult time charging money to people for things Jesus taught 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](http://www.renewedheartministries.com)

\*All donations receive a tax-deductible receipt.

Be sure to check out RHM's *FREE* resources at:  
[www.renewedheartministries.com](http://www.renewedheartministries.com)

## Schedule

### **MAY 15 - 17, 2015**

Turning Point Adventist  
Community Church  
Roseburg, OR, United States  
541.492.1300

### **JUNE 12 - 28, 2015**

Novo Airao and Manaus,  
Brazil  
503.348.5209

### **JULY 14 - 19, 2015**

Kinship Kampmeeting  
Pamona, CA United States  
[info@sdakinship.org](mailto:info@sdakinship.org)

### **JULY 20 - AUGUST 3, 2015**

Kapolei Heart Group  
Kapolei, HI United States  
808.224.7873

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