



Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::::: Volume 9 :::::: Issue 8 ::::::



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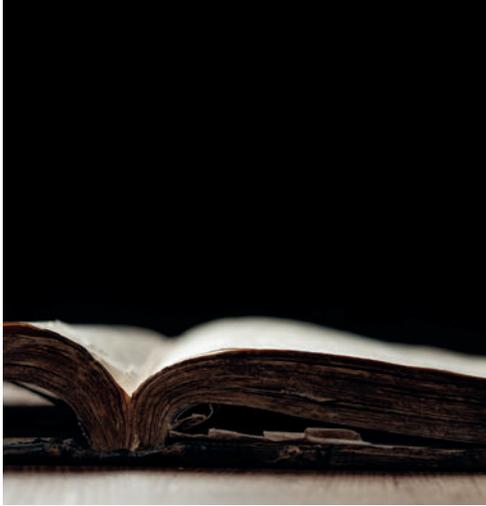
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@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery



The Shared Table

Jesus, the Meek, and the Golden Rule

*(Originally Posted on RHM's Website
August 14, 2015)*

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

*"The opposite of fear is not
courage; it is compassion."*

– Peter J. Gomes;
The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus

***"Blessed are the meek, for
they will inherit the earth."***

(Matthew 5:5)

As we look at the "blessings" of Matthew 5 this week, know that they do not say that any state is an intrinsic blessing. Rather they each say, that if you have any of the experiences Jesus describes—poverty, mourning, or persecution you will be particularly blessed by the changes Jesus came to make.

The first blessing, "Blessed are the poor," is a great example. It's not a blessing to be poor. No one strives and works hard so that one day they can be poor. But Jesus was saying that if the present arrangement of this world has left you poor, you are blessed because the changes I've come to make are in your favor. This is also true in the statement we're looking at this week, "Blessed are the meek."

Merriam-Webster defines "meek" as having or showing a quiet and gentle nature, not wanting to fight or argue with other people. It can also be defined as easily imposed on or submissive. There is no intrinsic blessing in being meek in the present world structure. In fact, meekness is a disadvantage in a world where everyone's looking out for number one, trying to get ahead, looking out for themselves. The world is presently arranged in such a way that it does not reward the meek, it steam rolls over them.

I experienced multiple examples of the truth of this in my travels this summer.

The first was driving in Los Angeles. Driving in L.A. is very different from driving in Lewisburg, WV. In Lewisburg, we look out for everyone on the road. Even cautious drivers are let in and taken care of. Suffice it to say, it is not this way in L.A. If you drive with any degree of meekness, that's the degree to which you're going to get run over!

On one of our flights, a large, muscular young man threw a fit in order to intimidate a flight attendant into giving him the seat he wanted. And it worked! As he passed by my seat, I noticed the tattoo on his arm in large lettering: "I trust no one."

In this world, a world based on competition rather than cooperation, it's not the meek who are blessed, but those who know how to play the game with the greatest skill. Even in something as simple as getting on the airplane, we don't look after the meek. Each passenger already has their seat assignment, and we will all be taking off and arriving together at the same time. Yet some people need to be the first on the plane to the degree that they will roll over others to do so.

Jesus isn't telling the people in his day to *be* meek. He is telling those listening that the world he was creating would bless *even* the meek, by contrast to the present world that doesn't.

Can you imagine a world, where everyone—*everyone*—treats another simply the way they would like to be treated? Matthew's Jesus points to that world using the language of his own Jewish tradition:

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Jesus is sharing a universal truth here. This is how it sounds in the language of other cultures:

"Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself." –Confucius (Ancient China)

"That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another." –Egyptian, Late Period Papyrus (Ancient Egypt)

"Do not do to others that which angers you when they do it to you." –Disocrates (Ancient Greece)

"Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." –Udanavarga (Ancient Buddhism)

"Do to no one what you yourself dislike." – Tobit 4:16 (Ancient Judaism, at least 200 years before Jesus)

"Recognize that your neighbor feels as you do, and keep in mind your own dislikes." – Sirach 31:15 (Ancient Judaism)

"That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." – Talmud, *Shabbat* 31a (Judaism)

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The Shared Table cont'd from page 2

"One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Other behavior is due to selfish desires."

–Brihaspati, Mahabharata (Anusasana Parva, Section CXIII, Verse 8) (Ancient Hinduism)

This universal truth that Jesus teaches in Matthew's and Luke's gospels contains the building blocks of a whole new world. And if we follow it to its furthest conclusion, we find it's a world that takes care *even of the meek*. Follow closely.

Jesus modeled this new world for us in his practice of a shared table.

Let's look:

"Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" (Luke 15:1)

"When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" (Matthew 9:11)

"The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'" (Luke 5:30)

"For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Luke 7:33-34)

Please remember that Jesus was not a Christian. Jesus was a Jew. In first-century Judaism, unlike in our time and culture, the label "sinner" was *not* a universal term. It referred only to those within the covenant community who were thought to be living out of harmony with the Torah.

Jesus chose a table that included those who, at best, were politically and religiously marginalized, and, at worst, were excluded by their culture's status quo. Jesus modeled a table, that to a certain degree, was *non-homogenous* (think of Simon the zealot and Matthew the tax collector). In other places in the canonical gospels, Jesus is clear that his table must also be non-kyriarchical.

"I do not call you servants any longer,



Early Christian Painting of the Shared Table

because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends." (John 15:15)

"But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you.'" (Luke 22:25-26)

"But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you.'" (Matthew 20:25-26)

"So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you.'" (Mark 10:42-43)

"After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?'" (John 13:12)

He modeled an inclusive, non-homogenous, non-kyriarchical shared table. And he invited us to sit with him there.

I believe Jesus understood that exclusivity creates a world where certain voices and perspectives are not heard, a world that does not fully take into account how others would desire to be treated or how we would wish to be treated if we were in

their position.

I believe Jesus understood that homogeneity creates a world that's unsafe for anyone who is different or unlike those seated at the table. To the degree that someone is not at the table, to that same degree those present will create an unsafe world. Ultimately, homogeneity leads to exclusion and exclusion leads to extinction.

Jesus understood that hierarchies where one human exercises authority over another human deny the image of God within both, and create a subjugation that leads to oppression.

I see this truth modeled in the Eucharist. We honor the memory of all who have been excluded, subjugated, and exterminated in the past. These were the ones Jesus also stood in solidarity with, and that solidarity cost him his life at the hands of the status quo. We choose, in the name of Jesus and in the face of this world's present structures, to shape communities in the form a shared meal, a share table.

Regardless of gender, race, orientation, sex, education, and economic achievement, everyone must be invited to the non-kyriarchical, non-homogenous table.

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MINISTRY

UPDATE

You, God and Jesus

A Weekend at

Adventist Fellowship; Tulsa, OK

August 28-29, 2015

This last weekend in August, I had the pleasure of sharing at Adventist Fellowship in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The title of my weekend was *You, God and Jesus*.

By the request of the pastoral staff, I began Friday night with the story about my dad that you can find in the first chapter of the book *Finding the Father*. The purpose was to consider our internal ways of thinking, that we all possess, about a Divine Being. When we think of God, what comes to mind? We talked about how each of these pictures is unique because each one of us is unique. And God is big enough to encompass all of these ideas. Yet within each of our pictures of God, we find a mixed bag. Some ways of viewing a Divine Being compel us toward the creation of a safer and more compassionate world for all. But other ways in which we view a Divine Being are very harmful. They cause us to create spaces that are very unsafe for those who are not like ourselves and in which fear replaces compassion. It is these harmful ways of picturing a Divine Being that the Jesus story challenges most fundamentally.

The next morning, we continued to look at what the Jesus story tells us about human suffering. For those who embrace the idea of a compassionate deity, the problem of explaining why humans suffer gratuitously and needlessly provides, in my opinion, the greatest philosophical challenge.

What I also find odd is that although the Jesus story prevents us from resolving this challenge in harmful ways, the Jesus story doesn't really

explain it either. In other words, we can see in the Jesus story what the wrong answers to why humans suffer are, but the story seems to be more concerned with teaching us the way to end human suffering rather than satisfying our curiosities by simply explaining it. Think of it this way: We understand why suffering exists. Now we can all go home with all our questions answered. But that doesn't put food on the tables of those who are actually going hungry tonight.

The Jesus story does not waste time debating philosophical "whys." That is a very Hellenistic way of approaching the reality of suffering. What the Jesus story give us is the "hows" of what to actually do about it all.

The gospel of Jesus is first and foremost a gospel of liberation, announcing the good news of freedom from all things that prevent us from being fully human.

In the next presentation, I offered three reasons that the Jesus story is still relevant in our contemporary culture. The first is Jesus' teachings on the liberation of those that who oppressed by and subordinated to others. The second is Jesus' passion for the oppressed and marginalized who were in need of liberation. And the



third is the most compelling reason for me: Jesus' courage. Jesus knew where his teachings would lead, he knew what his passion for the excluded would cost him, and even though he knew he would be exterminated by the status quo, his passion for those who were hurting gave him the courage to teach his gospel anyway.

We finished this presentation with the good news of Jesus' resurrection and what the resurrection event means to all who are subordinated or oppressed today.

We closed the weekend with Jesus' new world that he modeled for us in the shape of a shared table. We looked at the passages that indicate how the shared table must be non-kyriarchical, it must be non-exclusive, and it must be non-homogenous. We looked not only at where Jesus taught these descriptors but also at why they are so necessary if we are going to follow Jesus into a safer and more compassionate world for everyone. We are all children of the same Divine parents, and we must learn how to sit around the same family table once again.

We ended the weekend with a question and response session. Overall this session was positive. There were three individuals who repeatedly wanted to debate my public defense of including those of the LGBTQ community even though at no time had I brought this up in my presentations.

At the end, a gentleman who I had never met and who was visiting approached me and thanked me. He expressed how much had genuinely enjoyed the entire weekend until this last part. Then he confided in me his own orientation. "I'm gay," he said. "The hatred in this room right now is palpable." I apologized. I assured him that the voices he heard were only those of a very afraid few. But we all know how effective a vocal minority can be at making those who are different from them feel unsafe.

I apologized for not doing more to stand up for him, to which he responded, "Understand that you did not fail to stand up for me. You are doing awesome



Ministry Update cont'd from page 4

work and meeting people where they are. You are using the wisdom given to you to decide how much a particular group can understand at a particular moment. I cannot express to you how wonderful it is to have someone with your background and knowledge ready to teach Christ's message versus the co-opted message that has been passed along since Constantine. I appreciate all of the abuse you willingly suffered for me today. I thank you with all my heart."

To all who made this weekend special, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for YOUR effort to provide a welcoming place in which others can encounter Jesus. We all have a long way to go still. I pray we continue on the journey.

The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of liberation from all things that prevent us from being fully human.

He's still out there recruiting.

He's still whispering, *"Follow me."*

For all of you who are supporting RHM in the work that we do, I want to thank you as well. Together we are making a difference. We are making an impact. The mustard seed is growing, one human heart at a time. We could not do what we do without your support.

Sincerely, thank you.
Herb

The Shared Table cont'd from page 3

And if we would only choose to learn to follow Jesus and sit around this table with others, especially those who are not like ourselves, we could embrace a world devoid of oppression, subjugation and destructive violence.

I have not always understood this myself, but I am continuously learning. Today I see that if we would choose to live in the manner of a shared table, this would create a world respectfully and compassionately shared by and with us all, *even the meek.*

In that world, even the meek are blessed, for they, too, will inherit the earth.

Many voices.
One shared table.
One new world.

HeartGroup Application

1. What are some ways your HeartGroup can lean more deeply into practicing the universal truth of treating others the way you'd like to be treated?
List, together, at least ten.
2. Discuss what it is going to take to begin putting this into practice.
3. What challenges does your HeartGroup face now that this principle would significantly help?
List them.

It's my hope that your heart will, with mine, continue to be liberated, healed and renewed, till the only world that remains is a world where Love reigns. ■

**Announcing
a New HeartGroup
in Tulsa, Oklahoma!**

If you are in the Tulsa area, and would love to participate in the open, mutually participatory nature of a weekly HeartGroup, we are pleased to announce that one has begun close to you.

For more information contact:

Nathan Davis at 918.948.0772
or n8davis02@yahoo.com

*Quotable
Quotes*

"Violence brings only temporary victories; violence, by creating many more social problems than it solves, never brings permanent peace."

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
*A Tough Mind and
a Tender Heart*

HeartGroups:

Invisible: Organic Church

BY KEITH GILES

A group of local organic church members recently got together to make a list of things that are “wrong” with Organic Church. More specifically, to identify weaknesses in the simple church and to think of ways we can address these challenges.

The first one I wanted to talk about from our list was that “Organic churches are often invisible to the community.”

In our discussion we reflected on the fact that house churches don’t have large signs out front, and don’t market themselves the way traditional churches do. Because of this, it’s often likely that a house church could exist for years right down the street from another house church and not even be aware of each other. Not to mention the fact that people in the community are also not aware that the house church meeting is taking place in their neighborhood.

So, what are the solutions to address this concern? I’d like to start out by isolating a few specific items first and addressing them individually.

*House Churches aren’t as good at marketing themselves as traditional churches are.

It is ironic to me that the early Jesus followers’ shared table was not too

different from the early Hawaiians’ shared table. And yet it was later European *Christians*, having chosen hierarchical authority over a shared table, who landed on Hawaiian shores seeking to establish unjust political control over the indigenous population. They landed with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other.

Simply put, in the house church, bigger is not better. Now, that doesn’t mean that we don’t value evangelism. Our group just baptized 3 people last weekend, but this was after several months, even years, of relationship and discipleship over time.

Here’s the difference. In traditional churches I’ve served at in the past, our goal as a staff was to find new ways to attract a certain segment of people - young marrieds with children. We strategized ways to attract them. We flat out marketed our church to them with booths at local fairs and logo branded water bottles passed out at shopping malls and worship concerts in the park, etc. If we were successful we’d have 10 or 20 new people show up that weekend and they’d eventually decide to join our church and tithe: SUCCESS!

Now, with the house church it’s almost completely upside-down from that. In our house church we prefer to meet regularly with other disciples of Jesus; people who are seriously trying to follow Jesus in their everyday life and who want to connect with others who simply want to learn how to put the teachings of Jesus into practice daily. We’re not perfect. Far

from it. If anything we know how weak we are and we know that, without the help of the Holy Spirit and the support of our church family, we’d never make it alone. If we kept on adding new people all the time we’d dilute our ability to share deeply with one another - because there are some things that you’ll share with a group of five or six that you would never share in a group of 25 or 30 people. Also, if we were to grow too large too quickly, we would struggle to build relationships with one another and the quality of our community would suffer.

So, what do we do? Well, first of all we don’t attempt to artificially increase the number of people who fellowship with us. At the same time, we do not attempt to eliminate people or turn anyone away who wants to join us. In essence, we do our best to let Jesus build His Church. And you know what? He does!

When our family first planted our house church we did not recruit anyone to come with us. Only one other family, and one single woman from our previous traditional church came with us (and only because they wanted to, not because we convinced them to). Everyone else who has ever come to our house church has found us, we have not found them.

Secondly, I want to address the issue of being invisible to the community we’re planted in. To me, this is a more serious problem. We’ve always felt that our calling was not only to plant a house church in our home, but that God was planting a church in this specific neighborhood. In other words, we were here in this house because God had a plan (and He still does) to love the people on our street through us.

So, from the beginning (about five years ago now) we started reaching out to the kids in our neighborhood. At first that involved leading Kids Church in our home on weekends. Mainly because Wendy and I had been children’s pastors at our previous church (and we loved teaching kids together), and also because by inviting the kids in our neighborhood to come to our house church we would figure out which families already went to church somewhere and which one’s didn’t. Most of them, we figured out, didn’t attend anywhere.



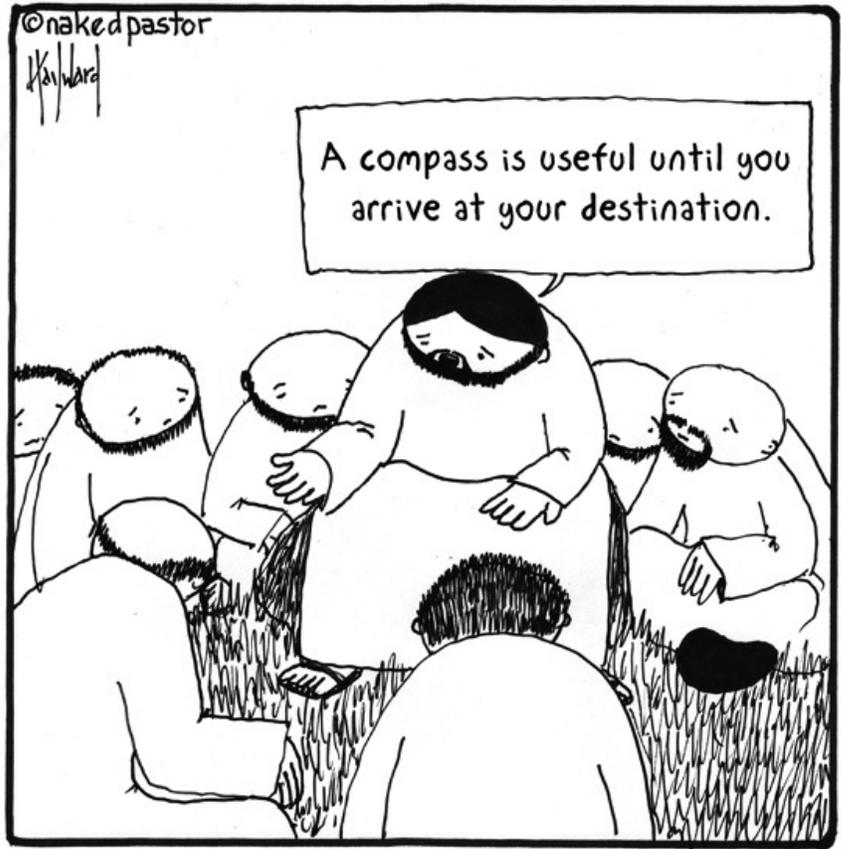
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HeartGroups cont'd from page 6

Later, we hosted pancake breakfasts for everyone in our cul-de-sac on the Fourth of July and we intentionally went out of our way to meet our actual neighbors, invite them over for dinner, take out their trash cans for them, and serve them in whatever ways we could. In essence, we determined that we would become missionaries to our neighbors.

Over time, (and this is an ongoing story), we got to pray for families in real trouble. We got to encourage them. We got to share Jesus with their kids. We got to see their kids fall in love with Jesus. We got to share groceries with families in financial need. We got to tutor their kids in math and spelling. We got to babysit when they were in a bind.

Suffice it to say, our neighbors know that there's a church on their street, and they know that we love them and that Jesus loves them. We're still hoping to make a deeper impact for them and to bring the Kingdom of God into their lives in a more powerful way, but we also know that God wants this even more than we do and He will lead us as we continue to submit ourselves to Him.



Schedule

SEPTEMBER 18 - 20, 2015

Walla Walla Men's Fellowship
Walla Walla, Washington
United States
509.382.3095

OCTOBER 2 - 4, 2015

Glendale City Church
Glendale, CA
United States
818.244.7241

NOVEMBER 3 - 8, 2015

AWC
Phoenix, AZ
United States
480.878.8565

DECEMBER 5, 2015

Adventist Forum
New York City, NY
United States
(To Be Announced)

Featured Presentation

Jesus was sent, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be healed. (See John 3.17) In Luke, Jesus models this path to healing through a shared table. It is in understanding three indispensable qualities of



Jesus' shared table that we begin to see for ourselves Christ's way to a safer more compassionate world for us all. It is our hope that your heart will be renewed as you listen to this month's featured presentation from RHM—*A New World in the Shape of a Shared Table* 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

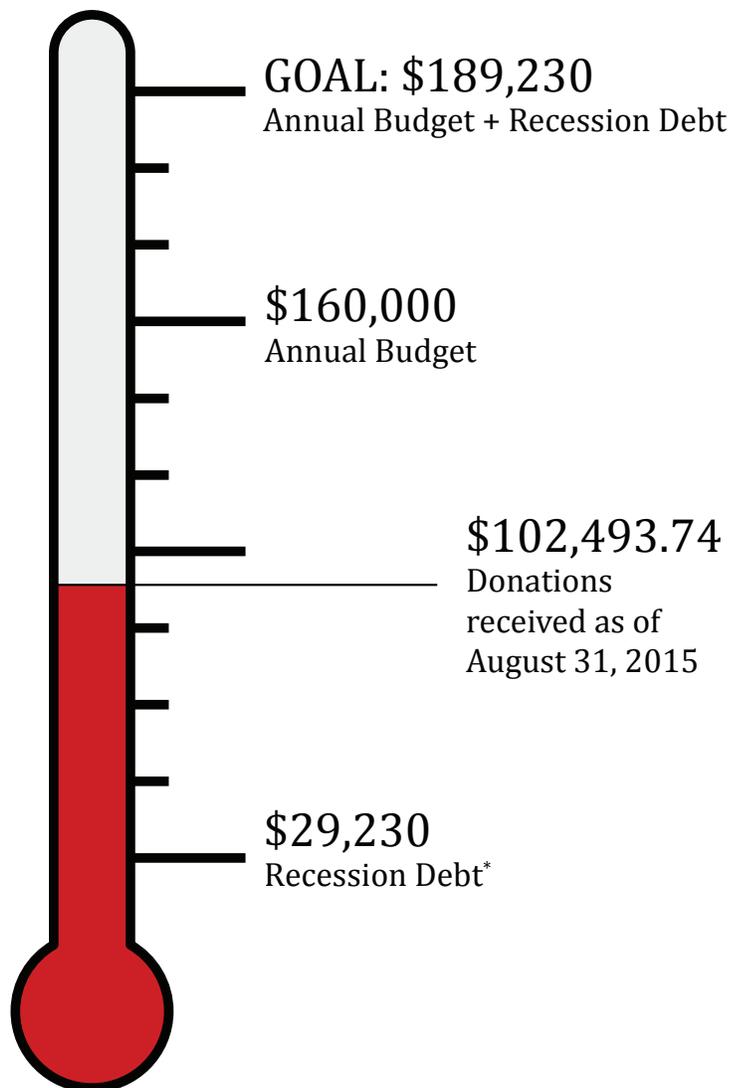
*All donations receive a tax-deductible receipt.

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

As always, all proceeds received above and beyond our budgeted needs are passed on to other proven and charitable, non-profit organizations who are making significant changes in the lives of the poor.



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*This is operational debt incurred by RHM over the years of 2008-2010 due to recession and a lessening of donations due to the financial setbacks of many of our supporters. It is our goal to see this debt paid off as soon as possible as funds are received to do so.