



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

:::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::: June 2016 ::::



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Renewed Heart Ministries

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Herb Montgomery

“And raising his eyes to his disciples he said: Blessed are you poor, for God's reign is for you. Blessed are you who hunger, for you will eat your fill. Blessed are you who mourn, for you will be consoled.” (Q 6:20-21, Robinson)

This passage has parallels in Luke, Matthew, and the 1st Century Christian text The Gospel of Thomas

Luke 6:20-21: “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, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.’”

Matthew 5:1-4: “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.’”

Gospel of Thomas 54: “Jesus says: ‘Blessed are the poor. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to you.’”

Gospel of Thomas 69:2: “Blessed are the hungry, for the belly of him who desires will be filled.”

The ethic of charity, taking care of the less fortunate, the poor, or the weaker sections of society, long predates the teachings of Jesus. What Jesus is doing here is not admonishing us to take care of the poor but rather announcing that the situations of the poor, the mourning, and the hungry are about to be reversed! I'll explain.

If we live in a society of limited resources, then for someone to hold on to more than what they need (i.e. wealth) means that someone else is going without what they need. Countless philosophers and sages throughout the centuries have taught this to one degree or another. Gandhi spoke of the earth providing each day enough for every person's need but not every person's greed. Karl Marx described our societies as pyramids with the wealthy elite at the top and the masses of working class and the poor at the bottom.

First Century Jerusalem had a similar social structure. The Greek and Roman empires had monetized the region. Historians estimate that over two million Jewish people lived outside of Jerusalem. Each male older than twenty years of age was required to pay an annual half-shekel temple tax, and so the temple amassed an enormous amount of wealth. Josephus recorded Rome forcibly taking money from the temple during its occupation of the region (Sabinus: The Jewish War 2.14; Jewish Antiquities 17.50; Pilate: The Jewish War 2.175-177; Jewish Antiquities 18.60-62; Florus: The Jewish War 2.293). When Judea was placed under a Roman Prefect, the Temple became the primary Jewish political institution. During this time, the Temple took on more of the role of a national treasury and “bank” for the wealthy aristocracy of Jerusalem.

“It is quite possible that, under pressure of this increasingly wealthy elite, the temple began to make loans on their behalf or to hold their capital so they could proffer from such loans to the poor.” – William R. Herzog, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation*.

The wealthy looking for ways to profit from investing their surplus in loans or acquiring land upon debtors' default created an unbearable debt load for both peasants and craftsmen. The farmers needed these loans to survive, the wealthy sought greater profits, and the temple, with its politically and economically privileged priesthood and Jewish aristocracy living in luxury, was at the very heart of a system of economic exploitation. As Josephus records, the burning of all records of debts held in the temple was the first act of the Jewish Revolt that led to the Jewish Roman war (*The Jewish War* 2:426-427).

The temple had become more than a site for religious worship. It had become the heart of economic oppression. This system created wealth through making others impoverished. And so in our first passage this week from Sayings Gospel Q, Jesus does not prescribe charity for the poor as a way to maintain an unfortunate but unavoidable state of affairs in a system that should be left unchanged.

cont'd on page 3

The Beatitudes for the Poor, Hungry, and Mourning

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

“God encounters us in the human condition as the liberator of the poor and the weak, empowering them to fight for freedom because they were made for it.”

– James H. Cone,
A Black Theology of Liberation

The Beatitudes... cont'd from page 2

Jesus is calling for justice toward the poor and change to the system itself for all who choose to participate.

Jesus announces a path toward a great reversal, where the poor are now benefited, the hungry finally and permanently have enough food, and those for whom the present system caused mourning, they will rejoice. The justice of Jesus involves a change for everyone.

As James M. Robinson states in his book *The Gospel of Jesus*, "It is no coincidence that the oldest collection of Jesus' sayings, what we call the Sermon (what Matthew expanded into the Sermon on the Mount), begins by pronouncing just such down-and-outers fortunate: it is the poor, the hungry, the mourners who are 'blessed.' The kingdom of God is not God's stamp of approval on the status quo, the powers that be, the ruling class. Rather, it is counter-cultural, for it gives hope to the hopeless. It is not consoling them with 'pie in the sky by-and-by,' but involves concrete intervention in the lives of the needy, mitigating their plight in the here and now" (p. 170).

In Luke's gospel we come in contact with wealthy Pharisees who reject Jesus' new plan and wealthy tax collectors who embrace it. Luke's gospel uniquely includes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, originally a story that the Pharisees told about a rich tax collector and a poor scholar of the Torah (see J. Jeremias, *Parables*, p. 183). Luke's Jesus expands the story from being about a tax collector and a Torah scholar to being about all who are wealthy (including wealthy Pharisees) and all who are poor (Luke 16:19-31). We encounter in characters like Zacchaeus tax collectors who respond positively to Jesus' new economics and choose to give their wealth back to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). And we encounter Pharisees who "loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus" (Luke 16:14).

In Sayings Gospel Q we find:

"For John came to you, the tax collectors responded positively, but the religious authorities rejected him." Q 7:29-30.

And Luke and Matthew also make this point:



"(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)" (Luke 7:29-30)"

"For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him." (Matthew 21:32)

This rejection was much more than simple disagreement about Jesus's theology. The religious authorities rejected Jesus' new economics.

In Sayings Gospel Q, we read one of the proofs that Jesus sent back to the imprisoned John: the poor having good news proclaimed to them:

"And John, on hearing about all these things, sending through his disciples, said to him: Are you the one to come, or are we to expect someone else? And in reply he said to them: Go report to John what you hear and see: The blind regain their sight and the lame walk around, the skin-diseased are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the poor are evangelized [hear good news]. And blessed is whoever is not offended by me." (Q 7:18-19, 22-23)

"John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask,

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'" (Luke 7:18-23)

"When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." (Matthew 11:2-6)

Sayings Gospel Q tells us what that good news was, a great reversal of affairs, and Jesus gives three series of teachings about this:

"The last will be first, and the first last." (Q 13:30)

"Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." (Luke 13:30)

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (Matthew 20:16)

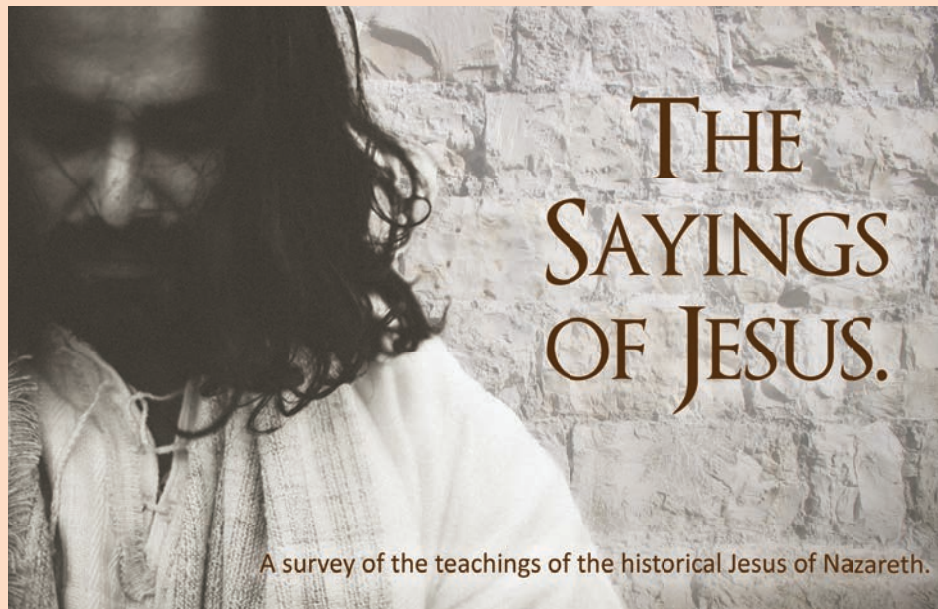
The Sayings of Jesus

Spokane Valley, WA, USA

May 20-21, 2016

Last month, I was in the Spokane area sharing a weekend version of our new weekly series *The Sayings of Jesus*. This series of presentations considers the sayings of Jesus believed to have been cherished by the community of early, Jewish followers of Jesus. These sayings have historically inspired significant positive world change from Francis of Assisi, the radical Anabaptists, to more recent figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. Whenever those who desire to rediscover and follow these sayings of Jesus the result has been positive advances toward making the world a safer, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

I was at the Spokane Valley Adventist Church in the Spokane Valley. I enjoyed making some new friends this weekend. It was also fantastic to see some old friends from when Crystal and I lived in Washington State over a decade ago. Some of these friends came from as far away as Walla Walla and Pullman. Thank you for traveling so far to join me in this event. I also had the immense pleasure of staying with some friends



who came up from Othello. It was so good to see each of you.

The four presentations I gave were:

- *Blessed are the Poor, Hungry and Mourning*
- *Enemy Love, Nonviolence, and The Golden Rule*
- *Mutual Aid and Jesus' "Empire" of God*
- *Three Reasons The Sayings of Jesus Remain Relevant (for both the religious and the secular)*

If you would like to follow along, this was only a weekend version of our much more in-depth weekly series we are presently engaged in this year. We began this series back in January and are continuing via our weekly podcasts. You can pick up where we are at or you can go back and catch up on what we have already covered beginning with the podcast episode *The Sayings of Jesus* at:
renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts



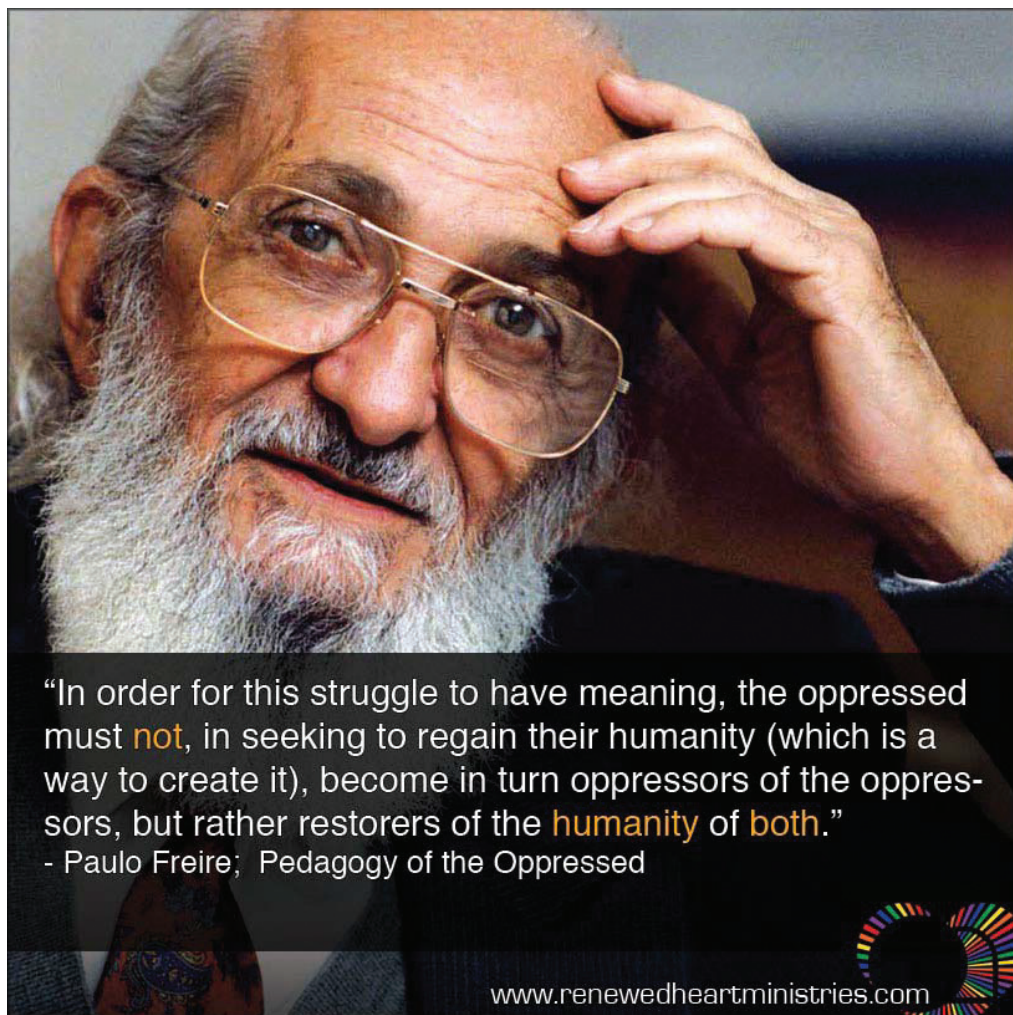
Jesus For Everyone Weekly Podcast

You can access our weekly podcast by three different methods:

1. Listen directly by going to Renewed Heart Ministries' podcast page:
renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts
2. Access it through iTunes by going to:
<http://apple.co/1rYmBQ9>
3. Or access it through your favorite RSS reader by pointing your reader to: renewedheartministries.com/podcasts/podcast.xml

New episodes every Friday.





"In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must **not**, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the **humanity of both**."
- Paulo Freire; Pedagogy of the Oppressed

www.renewedheartministries.com

The Beatitudes... cont'd from page 3

"For many who are first will become last." (Gospel of Thomas 4:2)

"Everyone exalting oneself will be humbled, and the one humbling oneself will be exalted." (Q 14:11)

"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

"For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12)

"Nobody can serve two masters; for a person will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon." (Q 16:13)

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Luke 16:13)

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

"And it is impossible for a servant to serve two masters. Else he will honor the one and insult the other." (Gospel of Thomas 47:2)

James M. Robinson estimates that "Jesus must have believed that, in spite of appearances, the givens of life were basically changed: as the ideal becomes real and God rules, there are to be no poor or hungry, no handicapped or sick, no exploiter or enemy, no mentally disturbed or force of evil. Jesus believed that this ideal was the basic reality and acted accordingly." (Ibid. Kindle Locations 2495-2504).

As we close this week, I want to address a common misunderstanding of a statement Jesus makes in Mark and Matthew.

"The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." (Matthew 26:11)

"The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me." (Mark 14:7)

Some have taken these words to indicate that Jesus is proclaiming that poverty is an unavoidable reality that will always exist no matter what we do. Yet when we understand this statement from a Jewish perspective, we see this is not the case at all.

In Jewish history, Yahweh had proclaimed that if they would follow his instruction to them, they would be poverty-free: "There will never be any poor among you if only you obey the Lord your God by carefully keeping these commandments which I lay upon you this day." (Deuteronomy 15:4, REB, emphasis added)

Jesus is reversing this statement from Deuteronomy when he states, "You will always have the poor among you." Poverty is a human creation, and thus, humans could reverse it if they chose to. Jesus is showing a way for his generation to do so through voluntary wealth redistribution rooted in love for our fellow human beings. Yet the wealthy elite of his day, including Judas, rejected his teachings in favor of greed. And as long as they held on to their present system, rather than eliminating poverty they would immortalize it. The choice was theirs.

The poverty of Jesus' day was the result of an unjust system. And just as following Yahweh's laws would have eliminated poverty in ancient Judaism, following the way of Jesus could have eliminated poverty in the 1st Century. Luke's narrative in Acts explains the results for those who chose to give his economic teachings a try:

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those

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The Beatitudes... cont'd from page 5

who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need." (Acts 4.32-35, emphasis added.)

What were Jesus's economic teachings? We'll learn more as we continue our study of Sayings Gospel Q, but for now, it's important to remember that Jesus's teachings were rooted in what he called the reign of God (the kingdom). For the Jesus of Sayings Gospel Q, a world where God "reigns" is a world where I trust God to take care of me by sending people who will care for me while I take care of you and listen to God when God calls me to take care of you!

"[Jesus'] basic issue, still basic today, is that most people have solved the human dilemma for themselves at the expense of everyone else, putting them down so as to stay afloat themselves. This vicious, antisocial way of coping with the necessities of life only escalates the dilemma for the rest of society...I am hungry because you hoard food. You are cold because I hoard clothing. Our dilemma is that we all hoard supplies in our backpacks and put our trust in our wallets! Such "security" should be replaced by God reigning, which means both what I trust God to do (to activate you to share food with me) and what I hear God telling me to do (to share clothes with you). We should not carry money while bypassing the poor or wear a backpack with extra clothes and food while ignoring the cold and hungry lying in the gutter. This is why the beggars, the hungry, the depressed are fortunate: God, that is, those in whom God rules, those who hearken to God, will care for them. The needy are called upon to trust that God's reigning is there for them ("Theirs is the kingdom of God")."

—James M. Robinson, *The Gospel of Jesus*

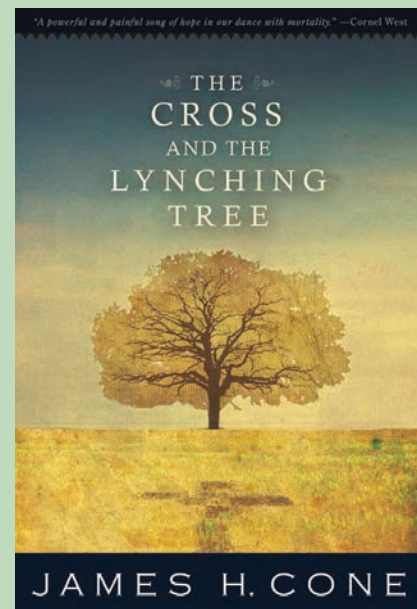
RHM's Monthly Book Recommendation

RHM's 2016 Annual Reading Course book for June is:

The Cross and the Lynching Tree

by James H. Cone

If you use Amazon, please consider supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries through Amazon Smile at no additional cost to you.



HeartGroup Application

In the 1st Century, Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, the hungry, and those who mourn. In our society, whom do you think Jesus would proclaim good news to today? Most definitely it would still be the poor, hungry, and mourning. But whom else would it include? Which other members of your human family would Jesus call you to trust God to send people to take care of you while calling you to take time today to take care of them?

1. Discuss this question with your HeartGroup and see which people or communities you come up with.
2. Dedicate time during your HeartGroup each week to share experiences you have when you reach out to take care of someone in need.
3. At the end of this special sharing time each week, share who you might have come in contact with the

previous week that may need your group's help. Combine your group's resources to see how you can care for them in the upcoming week.

For Jesus, the reign of God looked like people taking care of people while trusting God that if we would chose a world of "care," this would actually bring about a new human reality for us all. It's a world that we like to describe as a world where only love reigns.

We'll take a look at the next passage in Sayings Gospel Q next week, but for today, here are the words of Jesus:

"Blessed are you poor, for God's reign is for you. Blessed are you who hunger, for you will eat your fill. Blessed are you who mourn, for you will be consoled." (Q 6:20-21, Robinson)

Thanks for taking the time to journey with me in this series. ■





Schedule

JUNE 10 - 12, 2016

White Rock SDA Church
Surry, BC Canada
604.538.3303

JUNE 24 - 26, 2016

AWC
Phoenix, AZ, USA
480.878.8565

AUGUST 5 - 7, 2016

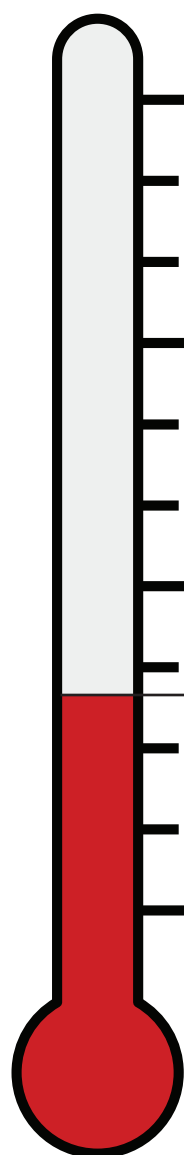
Carmichael Adventist Church
Sacramento, CA, USA
916.487.8684

AUGUST 12 - 14, 2016

Stanley SDA Church
Stanley, VA, USA
540.333.4458

April's Monthly Budget: \$14,167.00

April's Contributions: \$8,034.47



GOAL: \$180,087

Annual Budget + Recession Debt

\$170,000

2016 Annual Budget

\$45,150.46

Donations received as
of April 30, 2016

\$10,087

Recession Debt*

* 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 set-backs 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.



Last month we received our first support from you through both avenues Benevity (for employees through their employers) and Amazon Smile (online shopping).

Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you.

Every little bit helps.

**Remember
RHM when you
shop online!**

Renewed Heart Ministries is a not-for-profit group that is passionate about rediscovering, following and helping others rediscover the teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We believe these teachings have an intrinsic value in informing the work of nonviolently confronting, liberating and transforming our world into safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

Everything we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries is for free. Even the many educational events that we do in various venues. If you'd like to support our work you can make a one-time gift or become one of our monthly contributors by going to RenewedHeartMinistries.com and clicking the donate tab at the top right.

Or you can mail contributions to:
Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Also, please sign up for our free resources and remember, every little bit helps.

Anything we receive over and above our annual budget we happily give away to other not-for-profits who are making both systemic and personal differences, significant differences, in lives of those not presently benefited but the status quo.

And to those already supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, your generous support makes it possible for us to exist and to continue being a presence for positive change in our world. So with all of our hearts, "Thank You."

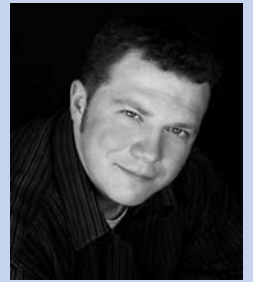
Together we are making a difference, till the only world that remains is a world where only Love reigns.



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Featured Presentation

This month, I will be condensing our *Follow the Lamb* series for a weekend I will be spending in Arizona. *Follow the Lamb* is a nonviolent interpretation of the book of Revelation as possibly held by second-century, pacifist, Jesus followers. This weekend version will be what I feel are the most important themes of this series. In revisiting this material, I was overwhelmed, once again, with what it means to follow the "Lamb." It is my hope that this month's featured presentation from our larger version of this series will renew, inspire, and empower you to continue following the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth more deeply.



The Real Left Behind



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