



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

αwakenings

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



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Featured Presentation

The Sayings of Jesus

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@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

"Be full of pity, just as your Father is full of pity."

(Q 6:36)

Luke 6:36: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Matthew 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

We can split this week's saying into two parts. The first portion is obvious: the call to adopt God's "pity" and apply it to the way we relate to each other. The second portion of the saying involves Jesus naming God our "Father." Let's begin with this second part first

Many have described Jesus as progressive for his era in his estimation of and relation to women. Eliel Cruz's piece *7 Reasons Why Jesus Would Have Been a Proud Feminist* highlights some of the evidence for this. Yet Jesus still taught in the gender inequality of his culture.

In a presentation I gave in the summer of 2015, *The Radically Inclusive Jesus* (renewedheartministries.com/presentation/March-Featured-Presentation), I argued that Jesus taught that women also bore the image of the Divine. In the Gospels, Jesus uses feminine images to represent God and God's reign. (See Matthew 13:33; Luke 15:8; Luke 13:34; and Matthew 23:37.) Writers also argue that including feminine images for God as Jesus did was perfectly in harmony with the Hebrew scriptures (see "Biblical Proofs" for the Feminine Face of God in Scripture mikemorrell.org/2012/05/biblical-proofs-for-the-feminine-face-of-god-in-scripture/).

There is more to the affirmation of women in the Jesus story than egalitarianism however. Marcella Althaus Reid (*Indecent Theology*) is just one theologian who has pointed out the problems created for women because both Matthew's and Luke's birth narratives begin with a virgin birth. Matthew also centers male perspectives and voices in sections of his gospel, including the Sermon on the Mount. Delores Williams (*Sisters in the Wilderness*), Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker (*Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*), and Rita Nakashima Brock (*Journeys of the Heart*) all critique traditional interpretations of Jesus' death and how those interpretations have

contributed to the abuse of women. This week's saying presents another challenge to the treatment of women within Judaism and Christianity, and that challenge is Jesus' gendered term for God, "Father."

Karen Armstrong makes a helpful statement in her book *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions about the patriarchy of Axial Age cultures like Judaism*:

"The Axial Age was not perfect. A major failing was its indifference to women. These spiritualities nearly all developed in an urban environment, dominated by military power and aggressive commercial activity, where women tended to lose the status they had enjoyed in a more rural economy. There are no female Axial sages, and even when women were allowed to take an active role in the new faith, they were usually sidelined. It was not that the Axial sages hated women; most of the time, they simply did not notice them. When they spoke about the "great" or "enlightened man," they did not mean "men and women"—though most, if challenged, would probably have admitted that women were capable of this liberation too... It is not as though the Axial sages were out-and-out misogynists, like some of the fathers of the church, for example. They were men of their time, and so preoccupied with the aggressive behavior of their own sex that they rarely gave women a second thought. We cannot follow the Axial reformers slavishly; indeed, to do so would fundamentally violate the spirit of the Axial Age, which insisted that this kind of conformity trapped people in an inferior and immature version of themselves. What we can do is extend the Axial ideal of universal concern to everybody, including the female sex. When we try to recreate the Axial vision, we must bring the best insights of modernity to the table." (p. xxii)

I agree with Karen here. In the New Testament we witness a push and pull in the stories of women for liberation from

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Being Full of Pity

Originally Posted Online on March 12, 2016

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

"When Jesus came preaching, it was to proclaim the end of things as they are and the breaking in of things that are to be: the status quo is not to be criticized; it is to be destroyed."

— Peter J. Gomes
The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus

male-dominated oppression in the early churches. That these stories survived means that at least some women in the early church felt Jesus' teachings set them on a trajectory of egalitarianism. One book that made a strong case for the beginnings of equality for women in the Jesus story is *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* by Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee. (Unfortunately this book assumes firm gender binaries.) Elaine Pagels also acknowledges this struggle in her book *The Gnostic Gospels*. She writes that one of the differences between those who won and those who lost the power struggle for control in the church of the second and third centuries was their difference of opinion on whether women and men were equal.

So again, I agree with Karen's statement above. The trajectory of the Jesus story can inspire us to bring to our reading of the gospels the "best insights of modernity." As we've seen over the last few weeks, the Pharisees eventually embrace recognizing every person as bearing the image of God, regardless of whether they were Jew or Gentile. That same trajectory eventually allowed people to recognize the image of God in women as well as men, too. We see this trajectory acknowledged in the writings of the controversial New Testament Paul: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) James V. Brownson (*Bible, Gender and Sexuality*) pointedly states that within the New Testament there are two streams. One is egalitarianism and the other patriarchy. The question we have to answer for ourselves is whether we perceive Jesus as pointing the way from the stream of egalitarianism toward patriarchy or from patriarchy toward egalitarianism.

So today, as we recognize the equality of "male" and "female," it is just as appropriate to speak of God as a parent, to refer to God as both mother and father, or "Mother-Father" God. We could just as accurately say, "Be full of pity, just as your Mother-Father God is full of pity."^[1]

Pity Versus Compassion

The saying for this week follows Jesus's reference to a God who causes the sun to "rise" and the rain to fall on all indiscriminately and Jesus calls us to imitate this.

The word for "pity" in Luke, which the *International Q Project* most believes reflects the Q document, is *oiktirmones*. *Oiktirmones* can be translated as compassion, pity, or mercy, and each of these translations has subtle differences, so let's discuss each of them.

Compassion is sympathy for those who are suffering and a desire to alleviate their suffering and work toward their liberation. Pity can imply a feeling of superiority; whereas mercy is compassion shown

humanity is connected, and Jesus sets the radical transformation of oppressors as the goal we should strive for.

As Howard Thurman relates in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, the slave participating in slave masters' Christian worship services could easily reason, "I'm having hell now. When I die, I shall have my heaven. The master's having his heaven now. When he dies, he will have his hell." And the following day, speaking of the master, that slave could say "Everybody talkin' 'bout heaven, ain't going there!" (p. 60).

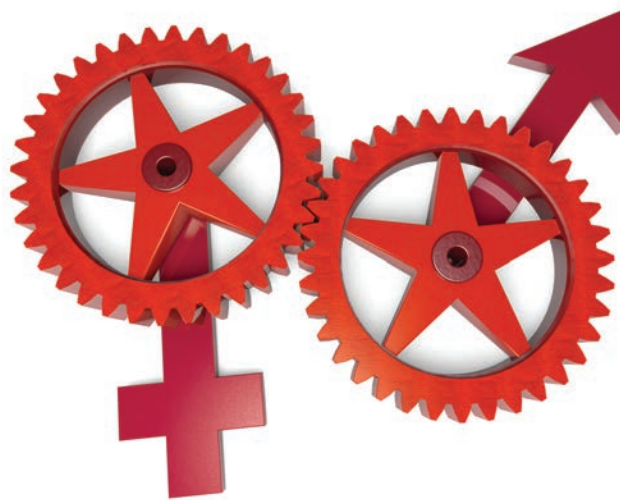
But the deep human desire is not to merely survive this life's oppression, but to thrive through liberation. Compassion will get us closer to liberation than superiority ever will. Perhaps, oppressors should

be pitied for being captive to a system of injustice that is broader than them, but compassion in the form of mercy can lift us above mere pity to work toward the transformation of our oppressors.

Let's also note that Matthew uses the term *teleios*, usually translated as "perfect." *Teleios* is the Greek word from which we get our modern word *telos*. A *telos* is an ultimate goal or aim. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus explains that he had come not to abolish the *Torah* but to bring it to completeness (*pleroo*). He is in agreement with Hillel in seeing the *Torah* as the beginning of a

trajectory that is not complete until it ends in compassion. Whether someone is our peer and able to reciprocate, lower on the social pyramid and without the ability to reciprocate, or an enemy, higher on that pyramid, we follow Jesus by treating them with the compassion and mercy we would want to receive. For Jesus, the reign of God is people taking care of people. And that was the aim that the *Torah* always pointed to.

In this, we come back to our original points this week. The Jesus story is part of that Jewish trajectory that ends with egalitarianism not only between men and women, but among everyone. At the end of that trajectory, no one dominates or subjugates another. We have a world where we learn to serve one another rather than create more efficient means of depriving others. In that world, we



toward someone who deserves punishment or harm.

Most can more easily embrace the ethic of compassion toward the suffering than they can muster the ethic of compassion on those who deserve punishment (mercy). And pity is even easier than both.

The teachings and example of Jesus do affirm compassion toward the suffering and oppressed. Yet the sayings of Jesus we've explored over the last few weeks also teach us how to relate to our enemies, those who persecute and oppress other people.

When we apply pity or compassion to our persecutors, enemies, or oppressors, the differences become clearer. Pity contains the temptation to believe that we are superior and disconnected from oppressors. But our goal is interconnectedness, not superiority. All



ADVENTIST FORUM

Silver Spring, MD September 16-18, 2016

Adventist Forum, publishers of *SPECTRUM* and spectrummagazine.org, is an independent, progressive, non-profit organization committed to promoting community through conversation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I received an invitation earlier this year to participate in their annual conference on nonviolence this fall in Silver Spring, Maryland. Nonviolence and the Atonement was the topic chosen. Gregory Boyd of Woodland Hills Church and reknew.org was their keynote. Other presenters included William Johnson, Keisha McKenzie, Jean Sheldon, Richard Rice, Charles Scriven, Ronald Osborne, and myself.

I've been told the presentations were recorded and will be posted online shortly. Boyd gave three presentations, two of which were followed up with responses by Sheldon, myself, Johnson and McKenzie. On Sunday, four final presentations were given by Sheldon, Osborn, McKenzie and then, myself.

Some of the highlights of the weekend were calls to understand the violence of Jesus' execution through the lens of the experiences of those already on the underside of our society. Sheldon gave an excellent presentation on Babylonian culture, Hebrew culture and the relevance of those cultures' influences on our various interpretations of the atonement. Osborn gave a superb summary of the work of the late René Girard. McKenzie's

presentation, *The Violence of Silence*, named the violence of how the Adventist church has remained silent throughout most of its history in matters relating to justice for the oppressed. Two of the silences named were Adventist's silence in the face of Native American injustice during the formation of the Adventist faith tradition, and the later silence in regards to slavery in the South as Adventism's borders expanded.

I delivered the final presentation of the weekend on Sunday. My topic concerned nonviolent critiques of what Christians call the Atonement that merely reject Penal Substitutionary Atonement, but fail to also recognize the violence within such explanatory theories as the Moral Influence theory and Christus Victor. Debates regarding those three (actually they can be expanded to six) theories regarding possible salvific "purposes" for Jesus' unjust execution represent a very small portion, globally, of theological understanding. These three ways of explaining Jesus' execution have historically risen out of male experiences in Europe and America. And as Jacquelyn Grant so aptly wrote in her volume *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, "Theology as developed in Europe and America is limited when it approaches the majority of human beings." (p.1)

As an option in our efforts toward understanding the Jesus story in a way that empowers us to embrace Jesus' radical teachings on nonviolent resistance, survival, liberation, restoration and transformation, I offered listening to the voices and experiences of those outside

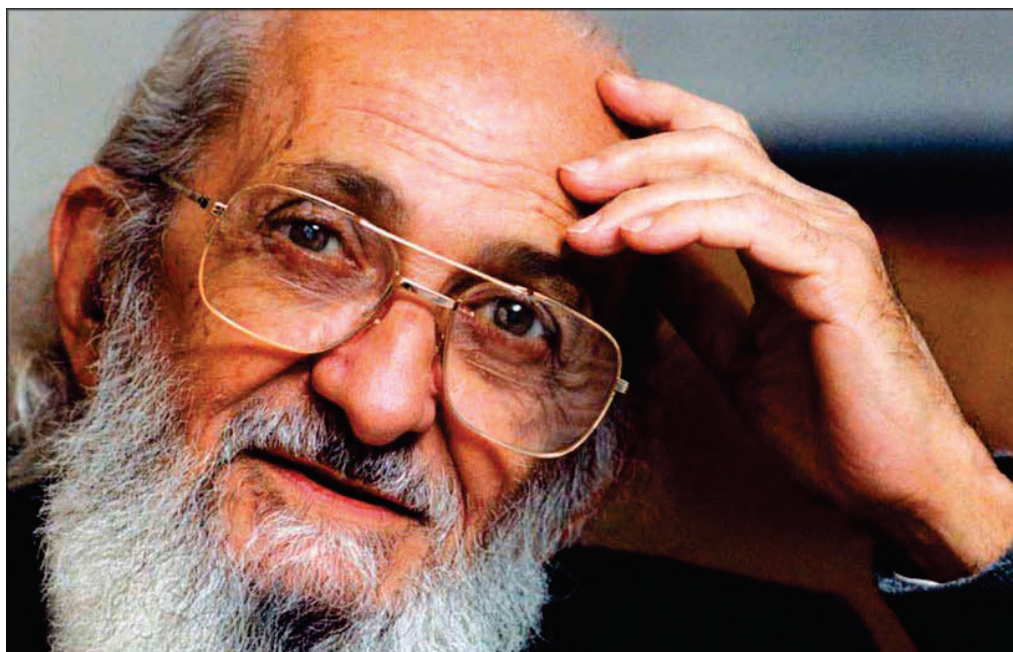
of male dominated theories from Europe and America. (I'll give a list of some of the quotations I collected for this presentation at the bottom of this entry.) These voices offer viable alternatives to understanding the Jesus story. These experiences, as well as the theologies that arise out of these experiences include the critiques and alternatives of Liberation theologians, Black Liberation theologians, Feminist theologians, Womanist theologians and even our Queer theologians. The alternatives that arises out of these broader and more varied experiences I believe offer much promise and hope for positive change, not just in how we interpret the Jesus story itself, but how our stories may become more holistically aligned with his as we work together in our world's maturing toward a safe, more compassionate, less violent home for us all.

I want to deeply thank the Adventist Forum for the invitation to participate in this year's conference. I met so many wonderful people. I also had the chance to meet a few scholars/teachers, who were in attendance, that I have desired to meet for years. And to those of you who follow Renewed Heart Ministries from all over the U.S and Canada who choose to attend this conference, thank you, too! It was such a pleasure to spend time with each of you during the weekend. This was the highlight of my year. To all who participated in this weekend, either organizing, presenting, or attending, thank you. I'm deeply grateful for the space we shared together. This weekend was a welcome reminder that the future remains bright! Here's to a world where all violence, oppression and injustice have been put right.

I'll post a link to the presentations as soon as they are available. Here is an additional link to an interview I gave leading up to this event.

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"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*

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Adventist Forum cont'd from page 4

Growing the Circle: Herb Montgomery Advocates Going Beyond Tolerance

spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/09/05/growing-circle-herb-montgomery-advocates-going-beyond-tolerance

*James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*: "What is most ironic is that the white lynchers of blacks in America were not regarded as criminals; like Jesus, blacks were the criminals and insurrectionists. The lynchers were the "good citizens" who often did not even bother to hide their identities. They claimed to be acting as citizens and Christians as they crucified blacks in the same manner as the Romans lynched Jesus...White theologians in the past century have written thousands of books about Jesus' cross without remarking on the analogy between the crucifixion of Jesus and the lynching of black people." (pp. 158-159).

James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*: "The cross places God in

the midst of crucified people, in the midst of people who are hung, shot, burned, and tortured." (p. 26)

Brown and Parker, *For God So Loved the World?*: "The central image of Christ on the cross as the savior of the world communicates the message that suffering is redemptive." (p. 2)

Elizabeth Bettenhausen, *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*: "Christian theology has long imposed upon women a norm of imitative self-sacrifice based on the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Powerlessness is equated with faithfulness. When the cross is also interpreted as the salvific work of an all-powerful paternal deity, women's well being is as secure as that of a child cowering before an abusive father." (p. xii; edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Brown and Parker, *For God So Loved the World?*: "The problem with this theology is that it asks people to suffer for the sake of helping evildoers see their evil ways.

It puts concern for the evildoers ahead of concern for the victim of evil. It makes victims the servants of the evildoers' salvation." (Ibid., p. 20.)

Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*: "In this sense Jesus represents the ultimate surrogate figure; he stands in the place of someone else: sinful humankind. Surrogacy, attached to this divine personage, thus takes on an aura of the sacred. It is therefore fitting and proper for black women to ask whether the image of a surrogate-God has salvific power for black women or whether this image supports and reinforces the exploitation that has accompanied their experience with surrogacy." (p.127)

Joan Carlson Brown & Rebecca Parker; *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*: "It is not the acceptance of suffering that gives life; it is commitment to life that gives life. The question, moreover, is not Am I willing to suffer? but Do I desire fully to live? This distinction is subtle and, to some, specious, but in the end it makes a great difference in how people interpret and respond to suffering." (p.18, edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Elizabeth Bettenhausen; *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*: "Several years ago I asked a group of seminarians to choose New Testament stories about Jesus and rewrite them imagining that Jesus had been female. The following recreation of the passion story of Luke 22.54-65 was on woman's knowing by the heart.

"They arrested the Christ woman and led her away to the Council for questioning. Some of her followers straggled along to find out what was to become of her. There were seven women and two men followers. (The men followers were there mainly to keep watch over their sisters.) Someone from among the crowd asked a question of a man follower, 'Haven't I seen you with this woman? Who is she, and what is your relationship with her?' He replied defensively, 'She is a prostitute, she has had many men. I have seen her with many!' The men who were guarding the Christ [woman] slapped her around and made fun of her. They told her to use magic powers to stop them. They blindfolded her and each them in turn

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raped her and afterward jeered, 'Now, prophethess, who was in you? Which one of us? Tell us that!' They continued to insult her.' (Kandice Joyce)

After this story was read aloud, a science surrounded the class and made us shiver. Ever since, I have wondered Would women ever imagine forming a religion around the rape of a woman? Would we ever conjure gang-rape as a salvific event for other women? What sort of god would such an event reveal?" (p. xi-xii, edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Karen Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother; Womanist and Xodus God Talk*: "If Jesus is on the side of the least of these, as Matthew 25 suggests and womanist liberation theologians emphasize, then this includes the earth. It too is hungry for nourishment. It too is increasingly impoverished."

Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*: It seems more intelligent and more scriptural to understand that redemption had to do with God, through Jesus, giving humankind new vision to see the resources for positive, abundant relational life. Redemption had to do with God, through the ministerial vision, giving humankind the ethical thought and practice upon which to build positive, productive quality of life. Hence, the kingdom of God theme in the ministerial vision of Jesus does not point to death; it is not something one has to die to reach. Rather, the kingdom of God is a metaphor of hope God gives those attempting to right the relations between self and self, between self and others, between self and God as prescribed in the sermon on the mount, in the golden rule and in the commandment to show love above all else. (pp. 130-131)

RHM's 2016 Annual Reading Course Book for November

Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism

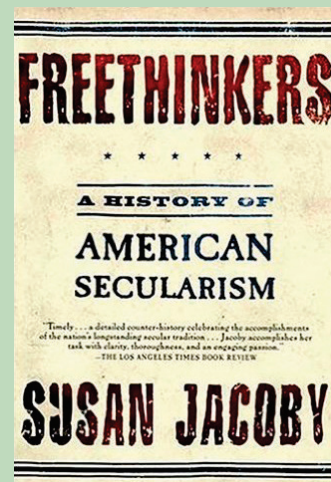
by Susan Jacoby

"Jacoby accomplishes her task with clarity, thoroughness, and an engaging passion."

-*Los Angeles Times Book Review*.

At a time when the separation of church and state is under attack as never before, *Freethinkers* offers a powerful defense of the secularist heritage that gave Americans the first government in the world founded not on the authority of religion but on the bedrock of human reason. In impassioned, elegant prose, celebrated author Susan Jacoby traces more than two hundred years of secularist activism, beginning with the fierce debate over the omission of God from the Constitution. Moving from nineteenth-century abolitionism and suffragism through the twentieth century's civil liberties, civil rights, and feminist movements, *Freethinkers* illuminates the neglected achievements of secularists who, allied with tolerant believers, have led the battle for reform in the past and today.

Rich with such iconic figures as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Paine, and the once-famous Robert Green Ingersoll, *Freethinkers* restores to history the passionate humanists who struggled against those who would undermine the combination of secular government and religious liberty that is the glory of the American system.



**renewedheartministries.com/
Podcasts**

New episodes every Friday.

Schedule

DECEMBER 3, 2016

Foster Adventist Church
Asheville, NC, USA
828.274.2014

JANUARY 13 - 22, 2017

Stanley SDA Church
Stanley, VA, USA
540.333.4458

FEBRUARY 10 - 12, 2017

Spirit Alive
Oshawa, Ontario, Alberta
Canada
905.571.658

Being Full of Pity cont'd from page 3

choose the way of compassion for everyone, a compassion as indiscriminate as the shining sun and falling rain. In acknowledging that our world is a shared table, we wake up, nonviolently confront evil, and transform our world into a safer, more compassionate home for us all.

The way of compassion is rooted in being "full of pity, just as your Mother/Father is full of pity." (Q 6:36)

HeartGroup Application

1. This week, write out what compassion looks like, in your view, for the three groups we mentioned above.
 - a. Those presently suffering from whom you will not receive anything in return.
 - b. Those you consider your peers who have the ability to reciprocate when you give.
 - c. Those with whom you believe you have a negative relationship.
2. Discuss with your HeartGroup what each expression of compassion looks like and which of these three you feel would most transform your world.
3. Choose one of these three compassionate actions to practice this week.

Till the only world that remains is a world where only love reigns.

I love each of you dearly. I'll see you next month. ■

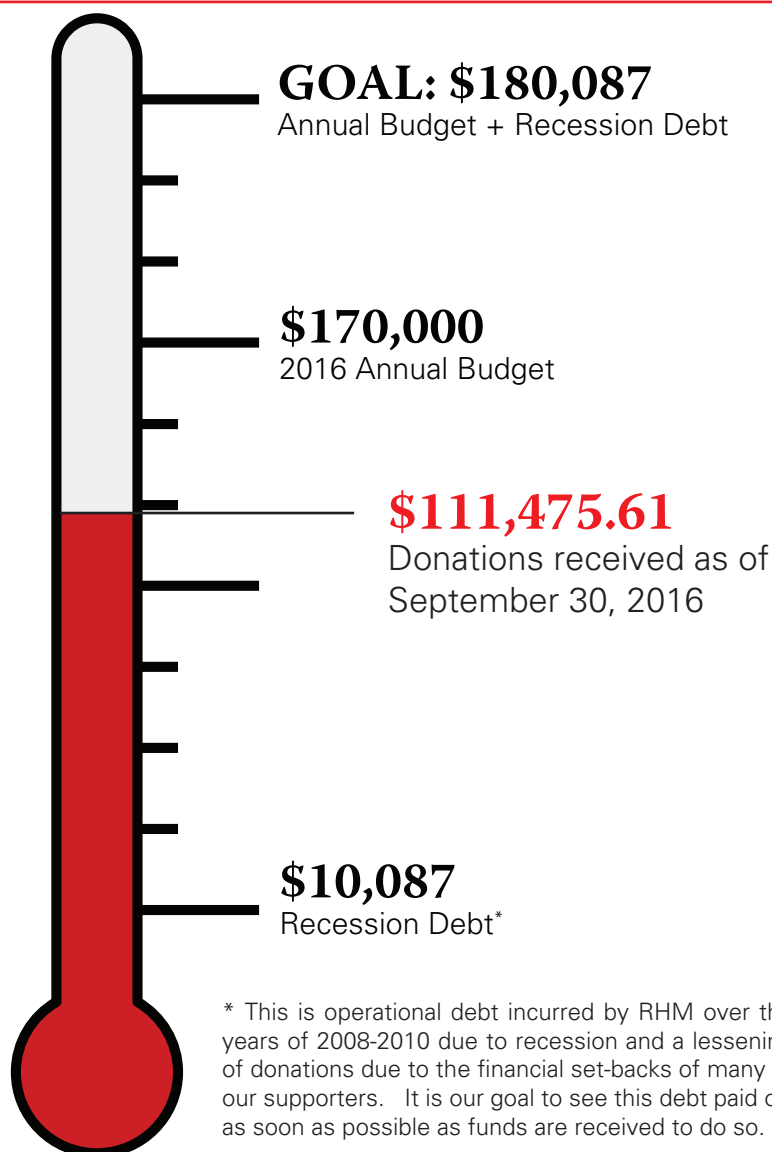
^[1] I did not get to choose the title of my first book, *Finding the Father*.

Annual Budget as of September 30, 2016: \$127,499.40

Annual Contributions received as of

September 30, 2016: \$111,475.61 (\$14,166.60 per month)

September's Contributions: \$17,788.67



This holiday season, if you are an Amazon shopper, please remember to use Amazon Smile and select Renewed Heart Ministries as your charity to support our work at no additional cost to yourself.

Thank you in advance, and remember, every little bit helps!

You may also do so directly through RHM's direct link: [smile/amazon.com/ch/20-8663541](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/20-8663541)

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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 a 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.



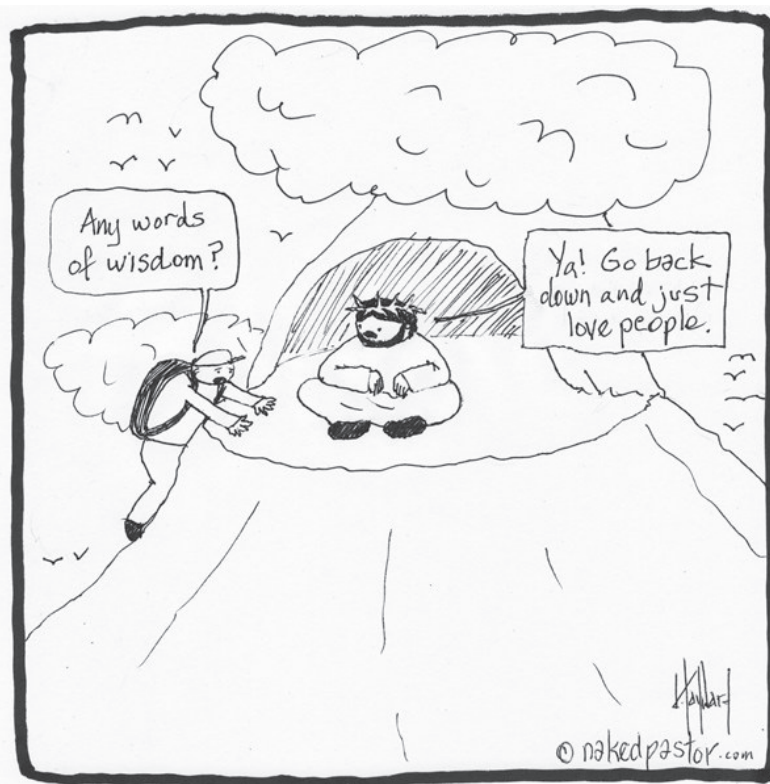
RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Featured Presentation

The Healing of Our World

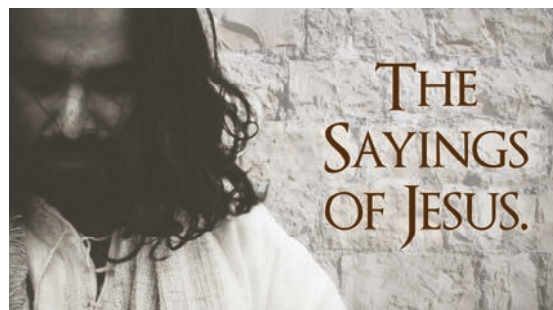
by Herb Montgomery

Last month, Herb had the pleasure of spending an entire week just outside of Seattle in Edmonds, WA. Each evening was spent exploring with the community there the wisdom Jesus shared and taught. Too often it is much easier to talk about Jesus than to talk about the things Jesus talked about. From a certain perspective, Jesus' teachings have an intrinsic value in shaping and healing our world. It's our hope that this month your heart will be renewed, as well, as you listen to this timely presentation—***The Healing of Our World*** by Herb Montgomery.



The Sayings of Jesus

As we are beginning to wrap up the year 2016, we want to draw your attention, once again, to this year's podcast series *The Saying of Jesus*. Each week we have taken one of the sayings believed to have been cherished by primitive, Jewish Jesus-followers and explored what relevance and lessons each saying might possess for us today. In centering our discussions in the experiences of those on the underside and margins of our status quo, we have allowed these sayings to inform our present work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration and transformation.



As this year is coming quickly to a close, if you have not been tracking with our podcast series this year, we invite you to do so. We will be continuing this series throughout 2017 as well.

This series begins with *The Sayings of Jesus*