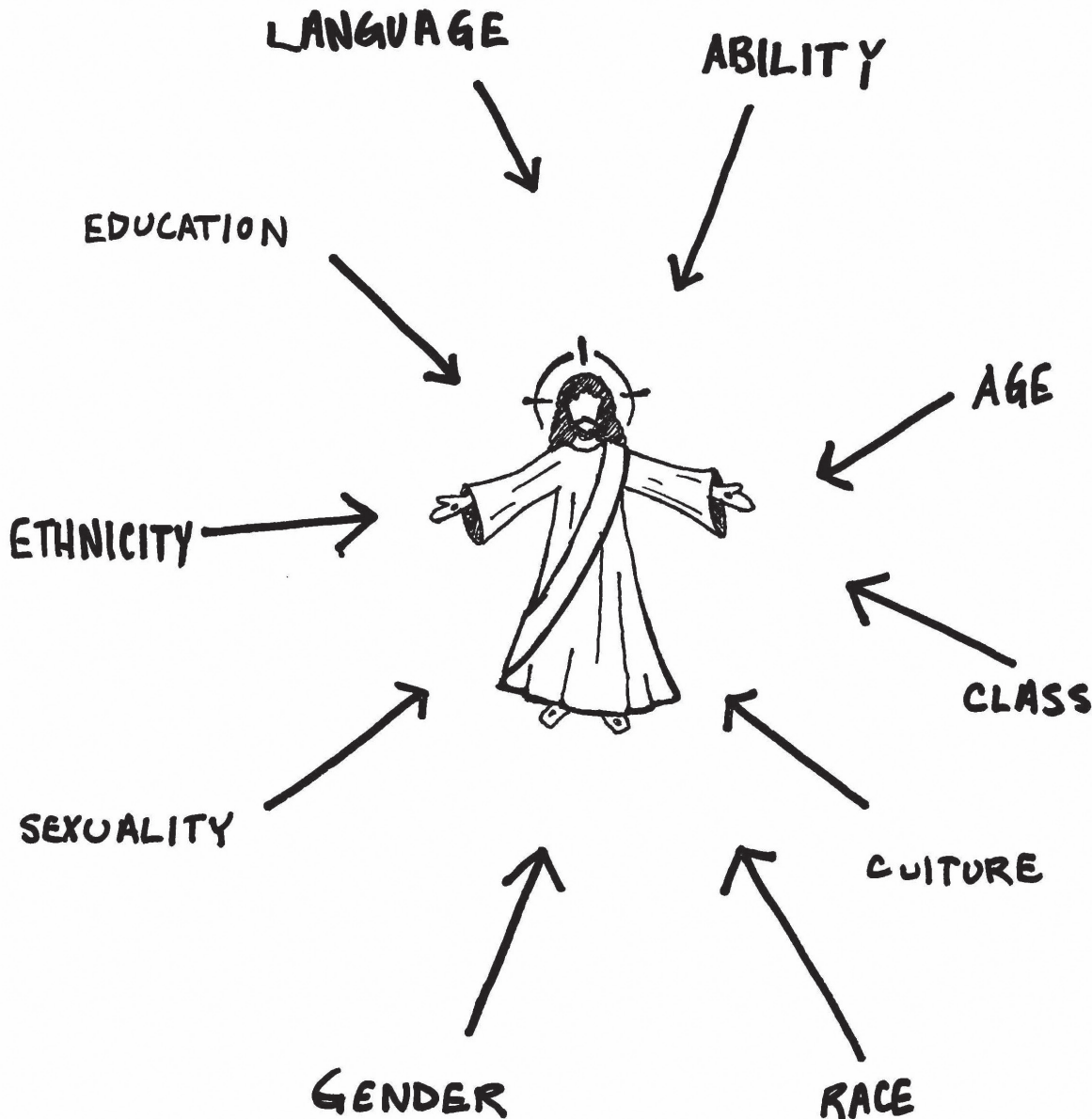




RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Awakenings

:::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::: September 2018 ::::



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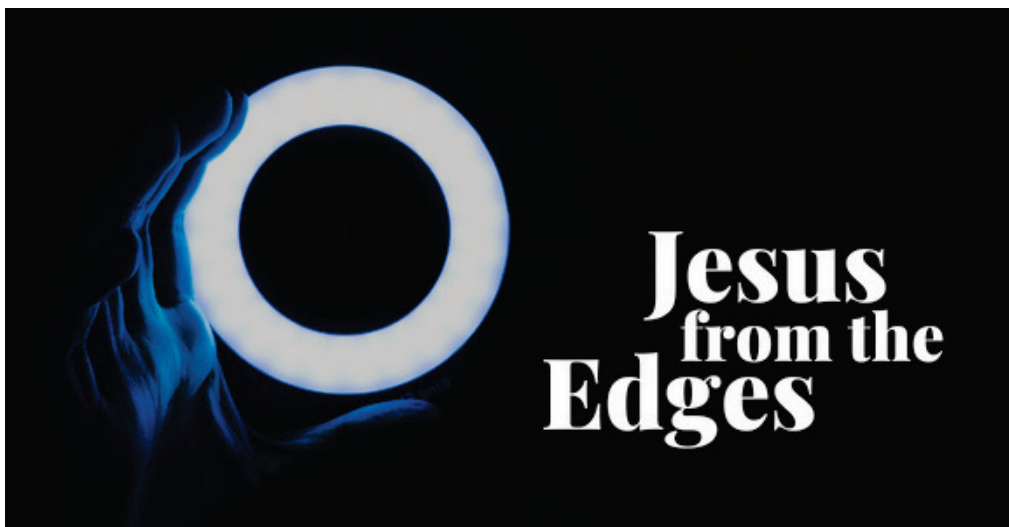
@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

Jesus From The Edges

by Herb Montgomery
August 10, 2018



“These societal structures all function based on the variables of race, gender, sexuality, gender identity and expression, current economic status, ability, age, education, ethnicity, religion, criminal record, and more...What does it mean for a Jesus follower to take seriously Jesus’ solidarity with those relegated to the margins and/or undersides of his society?”

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call [those you call] righteous, but [those you call] sinners.” (Matthew 9:13)

Quotable Quotes

“Justice and righteousness’ is how the Bible, as if in a slogan, summarizes the character and spirit of God the Creator and, therefore, the destiny and future of God’s created earth. It points to distributive justice as the Bible’s radical vision of God.”

– John Dominic Crossan;
The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord’s Prayer

In previous series, we have discussed how people in Jesus’ society used the labels of “righteous” or “sinner” to politically, socially, economically, and religiously gain power and privilege for themselves or to marginalize and exploit those who were vulnerable. (You can review this in *The Lost Coin and Solidarity with the Crucified Community*.) This week I want to build on this idea.

In that society, how well a person conformed to popular interpretations of the Torah determined where they fell on all spectrum between righteous/sinner or clean/unclean. The more righteous or “pure” one was deemed to be, the more their society centered them. They were more privileged. They had power. They were the elite.

Two groups in the Sanhedrin that competed for power were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees interpreted the Torah more conservatively than the Pharisees. This made conforming to their interpretation much more difficult. In many cases, their definition of “righteous” was only viable for those who

had the economic means to conform, i.e. those with money who could afford to live the way the Sadducees deemed pure. This ensured that the Sadducees remained in power under the guise of fidelity to the Torah.

The second group, the Pharisees, was much more liberal in interpreting the Torah. This made them much more popular with the masses. Under the Pharisees’ teaching, it was easier to be righteous and avoid being labeled a sinner and thus marginalized. The Pharisees were the popular interpreters of the “teachings of Moses.” Being favored by the majority of the people gave them social power, yet they also preserved their position as the ones who set the standard of “clean” and “unclean.”

This was a social, political, economic and religious system that produced winners and losers. In this context, an itinerant Jewish teacher from Galilee named Jesus emerged. He stood apart from both schools of interpretation and came preaching a gospel where the “kingdom” belonged to those left out of both the

Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

Sadducees' and Pharisees' determination of who was righteous. With this in mind, read carefully the following passages.

Luke 5:30—"But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'"

Matthew 9:13—"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Luke 14:13—"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind..."

Matthew 11:19—"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

Mark 2:15-16—"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

Luke 19:7—"All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'"

Today in the U.S., our system creates winners and losers, too. Politically, we also have two parties that compete for popular approval while gaining power in a system that still privileges the elites. Economically, our system produces enormous wealth disparity, with those who "have not" being the natural result of creating those who "have." Socially and religiously, we have complex systems that create an *us versus them* worldview and label those who are in and those who are out.

These societal structures all function based on the variables of race, gender, sexuality, gender identity and expression, current economic status, ability, age, education, ethnicity, religion, criminal record, and more. Our interconnectedness, our part-of-one-another is continually ignored.

Rather than seeing every person's differences as a testament to the rich variety we possess as a human family, we use these differences to "other" in ways that label some as "righteous" and others as "sinner." Those of us whose differences place them in a minority category are still members of the human race, and still part of us.

What does it mean for a Jesus follower to take seriously Jesus' solidarity with those relegated to the margins and/or undersides of his society? How can we live out that kind of solidarity in our context today? What does it mean to stand and work alongside those who are pushed to the edges of our society?

In the 1960s and 1970s, Christians developed a keen awareness of Jesus' solidarity with those labeled as outsiders, oppressed, marginalized and/or exploited. This emergence was global. In South America, Latin Liberation theology was born. In North America, other liberation theologies, such as Black Liberation

theology, Feminist theology, Amerindian theology, womanist theology, and queer theology arose. In the east, Asian theologies of liberation were born. Gustavo Gutierrez comments on the importance of this rising consciousness.

"Black, Hispanic, and Amerindian theologies in the United States, theologies arising in the complex contexts of Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific, and the especially fruitful thinking of those who have adopted the feminist perspective—all these have meant that for the first time in many centuries theology is being done outside the customary European and North American centers. The result in the so-called First World has been a new kind of dialogue between traditional thinking and new thinking. In addition, outside the Christian sphere efforts are underway to develop liberation theologies from Jewish and Muslim perspectives. We are thus in the presence of a complex phenomenon developing on every side and representing a great treasure for the Christian churches

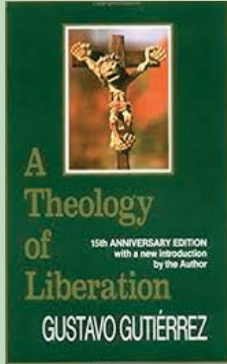
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RHM's 2018 Annual Reading Course Book for September

A Theology of Liberation by Gustavo Gutierrez

Few books have had the same impact on the theological landscape as Gutierrez' classic work *A Theology of Liberation*. This is one of our favorites here at RHM and it is with great joy that we add this book to 2018's Annual Reading course for September!



"This is the credo and seminal text of the movement which was later characterized as liberation theology. The book burst upon the scene in the early seventies, and was swiftly acknowledged as a pioneering and prophetic approach to theology which famously made an option for the poor, placing the exploited, the alienated, and the economically wretched at the center of a program where 'the oppressed and maimed and blind and lame' were prioritized at the expense of those who either maintained the status quo or who abused the structures of power for their own ends. This powerful, compassionate and radical book attracted criticism for daring to mix politics and religion in so explicit a manner, but was also welcomed by those who had the capacity to see that its agenda was nothing more nor less than to give 'good news to the poor', and redeem God's people from bondage."

*You don't have to order this book through amazon.com, but if you do, please consider using Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.com) and selecting Renewed Heart Ministries as your charity for a portion of your purchase being donated to RHM at no additional cost to you.

Jesus From the Edges cont'd from page 3

and for their dialogue with other religions. The clarification I mentioned earlier is thus not limited to the Latin American context but affects a process and a search that are being conducted on a very broad front today. These considerations should not make us forget, however, that we are not dealing here solely with an intellectual pursuit. Behind liberation theology are Christian communities, religious groups, and peoples, who are becoming increasingly conscious that the oppression and neglect from which they suffer are incompatible with their faith in Jesus Christ (or, speaking more generally, with their religious faith). These concrete, real-life movements are what give this theology its distinctive character; in liberation theology, faith and life are inseparable. This unity accounts for its prophetic vigor and its potentialities. (Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* [15th Anniversary Edition])

Womanist scholar and theologian Jacquelyn Grant comments, "Theology as developed in Europe and America is limited when it approaches the majority of human beings... nns Liberation theologies including Christian feminists, charge that the experience out of which Christian theology has emerged is not universal experience but the experience of the dominant culture...liberationists therefore, propose that theology must emerge out of particular experiences of the oppressed people of God." (in *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, pp. 1, 10)

Making space for these voices and attending to their insights is so very important. Here at Renewed Heart Ministries we believe that the teachings of Jesus—a 1st Century Jewish prophet of the poor from Galilee—can still speak into and inform our work of survival, resistance, liberation, reparation and transformation today. For that to be life giving, we must consider those teachings through the lens of the experiences of the people Jesus would have been addressing if he were walking among us today. As Ched Myers states in *Binding the Strong Man*, "The fact remains that those on the peripheries will have 'eyes to see' many things that those at the center do not."

From the experiences of those now in a social location similar to the social location of those Jesus taught we can see how those teachings help us in our work of making our world a safe, just, compassionate home for everyone. As someone who has been engaged in ministry for over twenty years, these perspectives, voices, stories of people fighting to reclaim their humanity in the context of their faith traditions have been the key to helping me rediscover and reclaim my own humanity as well. I resonate deeply with the words of Aboriginal elder Lilla Watson, "If you have come to help me, please go home. But if you have come because your liberation is somehow bound with mine, then we may work together." I don't work alongside communities working for survival and liberation out of charity. It is beside them that I rediscover my own humanity, too.

If one is new to these perspectives, where does one start? One place to begin is by exposing yourself to the writings and works of those who belong to these communities. An easy way to do this is to follow our yearly reading course at RHM. We announce each month's book at the beginning of each month. You can sign up to be notified of each month's book by signing up for our weekly news and eSights emails at renewedheartministries.com/Contact-forms?form=EmailSignUp. The point is not so much where one begins as it is to simply begin. One resource will lead you to another, and over time, you'll see the difference these voices make to you.*

Jesus did not call those who the status quo places "first." He instead stood alongside those his culture relegated to "last" place (see Matthew 20:8–16). He came not calling the insiders, but the people those in power had labeled as "sinners."

What does it look like for us to do the same in our time?

"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call [those you call] righteous, but [those you call] sinners." (Matthew 9:13)

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Building a Better Tomorrow

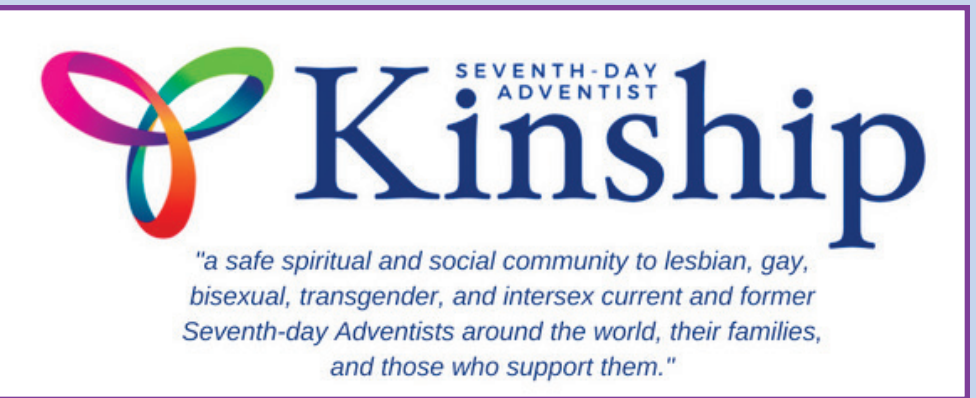
Kinship Kampmeeting 2018

by Herb Montgomery | August 20, 2018

Last month, Crystal and I, along with one of our daughters and our son, attended this summer's annual Kinship Kampmeeting. Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International ("Kinship") is a diverse, multi-generational worldwide community of individuals who are connected to the Adventist community. Kinship provides a safe spiritual and social community to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex current and former Seventh-day Adventists around the world, their families, and those who support them. "In the early 1970s, several Adventist gay people independently began to look for other Adventists with whom they could discuss their feelings. One placed a single, small notice in the classified section of *The Advocate*, a national gay news magazine. It resulted in 37 responses from all areas of the United States and Canada; all were current or former Adventists." (For more information about Kinship and their history see sdakinship.org/_files/sdakmediakit.pdf)

Kinship's summer Kampmeeting this year was held in Baltimore, MD. It's theme was *Building a Better Tomorrow*. I loved this theme. Genuine orthopraxy is not centered on post-mortem or eschatological escape, nor on individual, internal and privatized retreat ignoring the pain suffered by those around us. True orthopraxy is focused on engaging our world. It has been said that "The hermeneutics of the Kingdom of God, consists especially in making the world a better place." (Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: 15th Anniversary Edition*, pp. 10-11.)

My family and I had a wonderful time at Kinship's 2018 Kampmeeting. The session that remains in the forefront of my memory this year is the sharing time which takes place usually each year after lunch on Saturday afternoon. This is a safe, confidential time where



those who attend get to share their stories. Each person, if they so chose, took their turn and shared. This was a time of laughter and tears, moments of levity combined with times of deep solemnity and pain. These were the stories of the lives of human beings who had fought and paid a heavy price to hold on to or reclaim their faith in the context of a sexuality or gender identity/expression condemned and shunned by many within Christianity and more specifically their own Adventist tradition.

I was reminded again of how needed these spaces provided by Kinship and organizations like Kinship are. Story after story burrowed further in to my heart as I witnessed, again, how much these moments mean to those who attended. This community is not optional for many. It's the only spiritual community some have left. This is a place where both awareness and belonging are found.

What also stood out in my mind as I listened to the stories of those present was how wrongly the LGBTQ community is stereotyped by many Christians. Misinformed Christians push a narrative that portrays all LGBTQ people as damaged, broken and often as sex addicts. They are lumped in with substance abusers, those who are unfaithful in relationships, and worse. They are labelled and relegated to the underside and margins of humanity. These Christian stereotypes of LGBTQ people are not only false, they are dangerously life threatening. (See huffingtonpost.com/entry/queer-youth-religion-suicide-study_us_5ad4f7b3e4b077c89ceb9774)

Over and over again that afternoon, I wished I could shout from the rooftops that these are some of the finest Christians and human beings I have ever met. They are not defined nor represented by such words as, "promiscuous," "child abuser," "damaged," or "predator." I found myself in the company of fellow Image of God bearers, deeply committed to following Jesus, a testament to the beautiful diversity and variety of a humanity bearing the image of the Divine.

In a world that causes me to question both my faith in humanity and a sacred Divine, Kinship remains one community in my life that continually causes me to question my doubt. Yes, this life cannot be defined in black and white. But neither is it grey. The world I believe is possible contains every color of the rainbow. We can build a better tomorrow. And it begins with what we choose to believe about and how we decide to relate to one another today.

Another world is possible.

Thank you Kinship for giving me another reason to keep believing it. And thank you for your continued work and ministry in the lives of so many that need you.

If you would like more information about Kinship, you can go to sdakinship.org/_files/sdakmediakit.pdf.

Here's to a safer, compassionate, just tomorrow that begins today.

HeartGroup Application

1. Pick a book from our book list at RHM that you as a group can read and discuss together.
2. Read a chapter a week and determine a time each week you can meeting to discuss together what you have read.
3. Discuss how you can put what you've read each week into practice and do so.

I'm so glad you checked in with us, this week. Wherever you are today, keep living in love, survival, resistance, liberation, reparation and trans-formation. Till the only world that remains is a world where only love reigns.

Another world is possible. I love each of you dearly. I'll see you next month. ■

To support RHM and help us grow, go to renewedheartministries.com and click "donate."

*In the next three eSights after this article was written, we took time to listen to a few specific insights gained from these communities especially in relation to the Jesus story. You can read these articles beginning here: renewedheartministries.com/Esights/08-24-2018



The *Jesus For Everyone* podcast.

New episodes every Friday!

A weekly podcast where we discuss where faith in Jesus and social justice work for the vulnerable today intersect and what a first-century, Jewish, Galilean prophet of the poor might offer us today in our work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation.

renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts



Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

Quotable Quotes

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full."

– Wisdom;
Proverbs 19:17



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The RHM team, in any given month, consists of a small team of 10–12 people working either full-time, part time, or as volunteers dedicating hundreds of hours to make what we do possible. If you find blessing, encouragement, and renewal here, please consider becoming one of our Monthly Partners with a reoccurring donation or by making a one time gift.

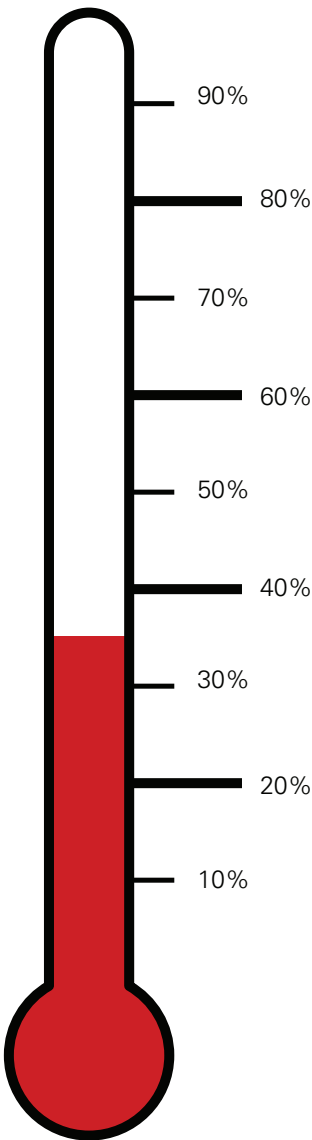
**2018 Annual Budget Goal:
\$183,206.00**

**January–July’s
Budget Goal:
\$106,869.00**

**January–July’s
Contributions Received:
\$63,029.52**

**Monthly Budget Goal:
15,267.00**

**July’s Contributions:
\$8,226.00**



**To support the work of RHM and help us grow,
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Photo by Chris Lawton on Unsplash

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 hold in various venues. You can support our work either with a one-time gift or by becoming 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 personal, systemic and structural differences in the lives of people who are less privileged.

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

Jesus emerged in first century Judaism teaching a new vision for human community. In the gospels, Jesus calls this vision the kingdom and reign of God. Jesus' God was a God of liberation for the oppressed, a God of solidarity with the marginalized, and a God who deeply desired a world characterized by a distributive justice for all.

Wherever there is a group of those wanting to live out these values, there we see an expression of this vision. This month's featured presentation comes from our series on the Lord's prayer. It's our hope that your hope and your heart will be renewed and your feet moved to action as we, together, follow Jesus in the work of transforming our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for all.

Enough Bread for Today by Herb Montgomery.

