

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



Awakenings

∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ FEBRUARY 2019 ∴



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RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

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Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

***“For God did not
send the Son into the
world to condemn
the world, but to save
the world through
him.”***

(John 3:17)



by Herb Montgomery | January 11, 2019

“Jesus’ vision for this world was not to condemn it, wipe it out, and make a new one. Jesus pictured a God who loved our world: a God who dreamed of this world’s healing, reparation, and transformation.

Jesus’ vision wasn’t to wipe our world out and start all over, but to see our world healed...Salvation is understood in the gospels not in terms of penalty and payment but in terms of restoration and healing in the context of the violence, injustice, and oppression faced by multitudes in our present world. Salvation as a post-mortem fire insurance policy finds no place in the gospels.”

My wife and I purchased a home almost fifteen years ago now. It’s an American foursquare from the turn of the 20th Century. We thought it would be a beautiful adventure to restore an old home together. We wanted to do all the work ourselves, slowly, as we could afford it. So today, we live in an ongoing construction. The journey has hardly been what we thought it would be.

Some people look at our home today alongside the before pictures and say, “Herb, why didn’t you just condemn the building, bulldoze it, and build a new house?” That would have been easier, but it wasn’t the choice we made. The house, though in need of restoration, had great “bones.” But getting it into shape has been a lot of work.

John’s gospel includes an interesting story. Nicodemus comes to talk to Jesus

in the night. And in the middle of their conversation, Jesus tells him:

“God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”
(John 3:17)

Contrary to many “end-time” preachers, Jesus’ vision for this world was not to condemn it, wipe it out, and make a new one. Jesus pictured a God who loved our world: a God who dreamed of this world’s healing, reparation, and transformation. Jesus’ vision wasn’t to wipe our world out and start all over, but to see our world healed.

The word in the passage most translated as “saved,” *sozo*, can just as easily and accurately be translated as healed. Salvation is understood in the gospels not in terms of penalty and payment but in terms of restoration and healing in the context of the violence, injustice, and oppression faced by multitudes in our present world. Salvation as a post-mortem fire insurance policy finds no place in the gospels.

John’s gospel defines salvation more holistically. What do we see Jesus doing with the majority of his time in all four of the canonical gospels? We see him going from place to place to place bringing healing and liberation. When I began to look at our world through the lens of healing and liberation rather than the lens of a fire insurance it shifted something in me.

In Luke 19, we find the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector. He was

responsible for participating in a system that benefited the wealthy, including himself, while impoverishing many.

The next thing the story tells us about Zacchaeus is the tree he had climbed. As in his own life, he had climbed higher and higher but as he sits in the tree, he realizes that the ladder he’d been climbing was leaning against the wrong wall.

Jesus comes to the spot where Zacchaeus is lodged in the tree and tells him to climb *down*. “I’m going to go to your house today.”

Everyone begins to whisper, “He’s going to the house of a sinner!”

The masses disdained tax collectors like Zacchaeus and labelled them “sinners.”

In Jewish society at this time, the label of “sinner” was not universal. It was a label the political elite used to marginalize and exclude people. There were two distinct groups: the righteous and the sinners. A Jewish person had to be living outside either the Pharisees’ or the Sadducees’ interpretations of the teachings of Moses to be labelled a “sinner” or “unclean.” Though they were born into the community of Abraham’s covenant, they could be labelled as living in such a way that excluded them from the hope and promises of their Jewish heritage.

(The Sadducees were much more conservative than the Pharisees, which served to marginalize more people as sinners. The Pharisees used more liberal interpretations and therefore were more popular.)

This pattern of marginalization was Zacchaeus’ story. He was a Jew by birth,

and so a son of Abraham, but on the basis of his complicity with the Romans, he was labelled a “sinner,” an Other, an outsider.

This is why the people in the story were upset that Jesus planned to go to Zacchaeus’ house. Up to this point in Luke, Jesus had practiced a preferential option for the poor, yet here he was now, associating with someone responsible for *making* many people poor.

Grace doesn’t mean letting someone off the hook. Genuine grace transforms oppressors, just as it liberates the oppressed. Did Jesus care that Zacchaeus was responsible for a system that was repressing so many? Absolutely. Yet something had already changed inside of Zacchaeus; we aren’t told how, and we aren’t told when.

Before Jesus could respond to the crowd’s accusation that Jesus was going to the home of a sinner, though, Zacchaeus interrupts:

“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” (Luke 19:8)

Zacchaeus was changing. As he climbed down from the tree, he was also climbing down from his position of power, prestige, and public privilege. Also, he was not seeking simple forgiveness.

Zacchaeus understood that following Jesus would involve him making reparations to those he had exploited. It would also involve him going beyond direct reparations to a kind of wealth redistribution to the poor because of his role in an economic system that drove many into poverty. I’m reminded of the words of Nelson Mandela who stated, “Like slavery, like apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome by the actions of human beings.” (Address at the *Make Poverty History* campaign, London, England, February 3, 2005.) The father of Latin liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, wrote:

“The poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. His or her existence is not politically neutral, and it is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product

of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalized by our social and cultural world. They are the oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labor and despoiled of their humanity. Hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order.” (*The Power of the Poor in History*, p. 44)

Today, in a world where poverty is not the product of scarcity because we produce more than we can possibly need, and poverty results from unwillingness to embrace our interconnectedness and share, these words ring true: “There was a time when poverty was considered to be an unavoidable fate, but such a view is no longer possible or responsible. Now we know that poverty is not simply a misfortune; it is an injustice.” (*Remembering the Poor: An Interview with Gustavo Gutiérrez* www.americamagazine.org/faith/2003/02/03/remembering-poor-interview-gustavo-gutierrez)

Zacchaeus followed Jesus. He didn’t only believe another world was possible. He actually moved toward that world. Jesus responded to him by saying:

“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.” (Luke 19:9)

Right there, then, at that very moment “salvation”—*healing*—had come to Zacchaeus’ house.

What would it mean for salvation or healing to come to your house right now? Would it come in the form of liberation for you and the community you belong to? Or would it, like it did for Zacchaeus, come in the form of your transformation: you taking up the work of liberation with others working for their freedom and regaining your own humanity as you go? In our world where inequality and injustice are most often rooted in disparities based on race, gender, education, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, class, ability, and more, what would Zacchaeus-like salvation look like for you?

“For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but to [heal] the world through him.” (John 3:17)

HeartGroup Application

Healing our world can take a myriad of different forms. This week, here in the U.S. we find ourselves in the midst of a heated debate over our treatment of Jesus’ “strangers” and what, if not ended by this Saturday, could be the longest government shutdown in the history of the U.S. I’ve heard from many of you, who follow RHM, who are federal employees. I’ve heard the stories of how you feel as if you are being held for ransom as you continue to go without pay, some of you expected to show up to work regardless.

Last April our book of the month for RHM’s annual suggested reading course was Rev. Kelly Brown Douglass’ *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. In the very first chapter, in the section titled *The Making of Cherished Property: The Immigration Paradox*, Douglass lays out the history of racism that has ever been at the heart of our immigration debates. This week I would like to return to this chapter. Read and discuss this chapter as a group. How does this history inform how you consider what happening presently along the southern border of the U.S.?

Just this week, Jim Wallis of *Sojourners*, a Christian magazine dedicated to Jesus and societal justice, implored his readers: “Right now, it’s important that you tell your senator to pass funding bills to restore the operation of government agencies, without approving Donald Trump’s 2,200-mile monument to racism.” I agree on both counts. Right now, it is important to be contacting your Congressional representatives. And Wallis’ is correct in naming Trump’s wall as a “2,200-mile monument to racism,” especially in the context of the history of our immigration debate here in the U.S.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus condemns the choices of his followers who failed to follow his teachings in

Book of the Month for February 2019

***God and the Gay Christian:
The Biblical Case In Support of
Same-Sex Relationships***
by Matthew Vines

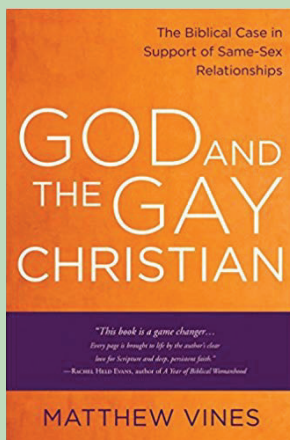
The landmark book exploring what the Bible actually says—and doesn't say—about same-sex relationships.

As a young Christian man, Matthew Vines harbored the same basic hopes of most young people: to someday share his life with someone, to build a family of his own, to give and receive love. But when he realized he was gay, those hopes were called into question. The Bible, he'd been taught, condemned gay relationships.

Feeling the tension between his understanding of the Bible and the reality of his same-sex orientation, Vines devoted years of intensive research into what the Bible says about homosexuality. With care and

precision, Vines asked questions such as:

- Do biblical teachings on the marriage covenant preclude same-sex marriage or not?
- How should we apply the teachings of Jesus to the gay debate?
- Can celibacy be a calling when it is mandated, not chosen?
- What did Paul have in mind when he warned against same-sex relations?



Unique in its affirmation of both an orthodox faith and sexual diversity, *God and the Gay Christian* has sparked heated debate, sincere soul searching, and widespread cultural change on the issue of what it means to be a faithful gay Christian.

[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 designated charity for a portion of your purchase to be donated to RHM at no additional cost to you.]

Salvation... cont'd from page 3

moments such as these. "I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." (Matthew 25:43) Besides contacting your representatives, what else can you as a HeartGroup do to be a source of healing in your community presently? Sharing an informed summary of our history to those who are misinformed in our daily discussions with others? Providing support for those seeking asylum in this country either directly if you live in an area along the southern border or through supporting an organization that is providing help? Do you have any federal workers in your HeartGroup that you can surround and come under and support during this difficult time for them, as well? Come up with something you can do as a group and do it.

Rev. John Dorhaur, who is the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, said it rightly this week, "We are faced with a *moral* crisis as a country, not a border crisis, nor a national emergency." History is being made. Let's make sure we are on the right side of it.

Thank you for checking in with us this week. I'm so glad you are here.

I love each of you dearly. ■



Schedule

MARCH 2, 2019

Finding Jesus
Glendale, CA, USA
304.520.0030

MAY 2-5, 2019

Rehoboth Weekend Retreat
Rehoboth Beach, DE, USA
304.520.0030

JULY 10-13, 2019

40th Annual Kinship Kampmeeting
Portland, OR, USA
304.520.0030

* *Holy Troublemakers* Tour
Rescheduled to the summer of 2020



HeartGroups

Jesus's social vision was a world where people take responsibility for taking care of other people. Each part of the good news he shared with the poor—survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation—depends on community. We can't fully follow Jesus's teachings outside of community. HeartGroups are spaces where we can practice what Jesus taught together.

Community

We're connected to one another. Society and social structures teach us that we are independent and should be self-reliant, but we're part of one another. We're dependent on each other and our communities are equally interdependent. We are each other's fate.

Most HeartGroups meet weekly or monthly for a time of sharing, discussion, and exploration of Jesus's teachings and how they apply to our lives today. Discussion can center on social events, a book the group is reading, a topic group members choose, or one of the many HeartGroup Applications that Renewed Heart Ministries publishes each week. In HeartGroups we learn from each other.

Mutual Aid & Resource Sharing

HeartGroups are more than places for spiritual communion. They also have an economic component: Jesus' shared table was about following him, not just worshiping him and so the church of the book of Acts aimed to eliminate poverty among their members with mutual aid and resource-sharing (Acts 4:34).

HeartGroups affirm that part of being connected to each other is belonging to a community where members can be helped when down and out and they can also help others. Each group chooses for

itself whether to branch out and help those outside its group too.

Jesus called us to embrace the belief that there is enough to share. Our voluntary sharing replaces anxiety with gratitude, generosity, connectedness, community, and hospitality. Rather than monopolies and exploitation, "enough for everyone" brings with it a distributive justice and replaces violence with peace.

Non-hierarchical Equality

Our hope for the future is not in more efficiently exercising power over others, but in more effectively serving and taking care of each other. HeartGroups imitate the shared table that Jesus modeled for his disciples in the gospels. In these groups, we sit together as equals. Our differences are celebrated, not demonized. HeartGroups are non-homogenous groups where every voice matters and we learn from each other. HeartGroup sharing is open and participatory. These are not places where the same person does all the talking each week while everyone else sits and listens. Each person is believed to have something of value to contribute to the group as a whole.

Inclusivity

We believe that every voice matters and that every person's story matters. We're interested in a world where people who have power and resources share with those who are meek. Those we fail to include at our shared table are often also excluded in the larger society, and no world we create will be a safe, compassionate, just home for people we don't include or value.

Gathering times for HeartGroups are by design a time of sharing life together. We share our joys and our struggles. We share how each of us experiences the world around us, and we attempt to integrate these diverse experiences into a meaningful and coherent whole.

Inclusivity does not mean "anything goes." Allowing even respectful disagreement over whether another person should exist is not "creating safe space." Our inclusivity excludes bigotry, fear, and insecurity regarding our differences. In the rare event that someone may be excluded, the group must measure whether this exclusion is rooted in fear of that which is different or truly supports group safety.

HeartGroups gather in informal community gathering places such as living rooms and local coffee shops. They center their values and ethics in the experiences of those on the undersides and margins of our societies. Wherever they're located, HeartGroups will be informed by the sayings and teachings of the historical Jewish Jesus of Nazareth and help each other lean more deeply into the practice of these teachings.

Each week we offer optional activities for HeartGroups through our eSights and weekly podcast. If you would like more information on how to start a HeartGroup of your own or to find an already existing HeartGroup in your area, please contact us at info@renewedheartministries.com.

Affirmation

"Renewed Heart Ministries has been the most powerful positive influence our lives. We have been privileged to have been able to witness first hand the inside life of a family who puts words into action. The ministry as a whole has indeed renewed our hearts and opened our eyes to a God more wonderful than we could ever have hoped for or imagined. Thank you, thank you, thank you so much for your guidance in our perspective on life's important issues. You are responsible for the freedom we now enjoy as we live our lives with new eyes to make an immediate difference in the world around us. We love you all very deeply and miss you tremendously."

— W. & J. K.; *HeartGroup, Oahu Chapter*

Learning about Heart Groups and then getting to help start one has been an amazing journey. Meeting weekly as a Heart Group has allowed me (and others) the opportunity to learn about God in a more relaxed and comfortable arena compared to a more traditional church setting. I feel safe to share my questions, struggles, and blessings because I know we are all learning together. I like the idea of "doing church" like Jesus did, with a mutual exchange of ideas and learning. No one person is superior to another, we just live life together, and it's great!" — L.D.

F.U.E.L. in Philadelphia

January 29, 2019

by Herb Montgomery

This past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the third anniversary of a Christian LGBTQ fellowship in Philadelphia named F.U.E.L. I've written about this group before (renewedheartministries.com/news/F-U-E-L). I attended their very first gathering and I've been at both of their anniversaries since.

One of the ministries RHM participates in is helping LGBTQ Christians and former Christians recover from religious abuse they have suffered from Christianity. As followers of Jesus, we feel this is important for multiple reasons. First and foremost is that those who identify as LGBTQ are human. They are our siblings to whom certain sectors of Christianity have done great harm. Jesus modeled being a source of healing in our world. There are so many false narratives and brazen lies spoken about LGBTQ folks from Christians, simply out of fear of what they do not understand. We want to be a resource in aiding their journey toward healing from the religious abuse they have suffered at the hands of Christians.

Another reason is Jesus' preferential option for the marginalized in his own society. Jesus modeled an inclusion and affirmation of those who were being wrongly labeled as "sinners" and pushed to the edges of society as a result. I want to be very careful here. The label of "sinner" has a long history of abuse. In Jesus' era, the label of "sinner" was used by those in positions of power and privilege as a basis for disenfranchisement and discrimination of others. Whether one subscribed to the more strict interpretations of Torah by the Sadducees or the more liberal and generous interpretations by the Pharisees depended on how difficult or easy it was for someone to avoid the label of "sinner." There were those, also, who were vulnerable regardless of which school of interpretation was used. In the gospels, Jesus abandoned this system of marginalization entirely. He envisioned, instead, a society shaped in the form of an inclusive shared



table, with the practice of a preferential option for those most vulnerable to marginalization. Today we believe Christians are wrongfully labelling our friends, family and neighbors who identify as LGBTQ, and we have a strong example set in the Jesus story of affirmation and inclusion instead.

Jesus is also characterized in the gospels as a teacher. Therefore, in addition to the above, we at RHM will continue educating followers of Jesus, especially in regards to the role Christianity has played in harming the LGBTQ community as well as other communities who have also been marginalized and harmed by us.

I was so encouraged by fellowshipping with this group of LGBTQ Christians again. They have been meeting weekly now for three years. They were born out of experiences of being excluded by their various previous faith communities. As they looked back over the last three years, story after story was told of those for whom F.U.E.L. has been a source of healing, learning, and life.

When it came time for me to speak, I shared an updated version of a presentation I had given previously in Asheville, North Carolina entitled *Jesus' Preferential Option for the Marginalized: LGBTQIA Identities and the Image of God*. The response was overwhelming. One person shared how Renewed Heart Ministries had been such an integral part of their journey out of self hatred to where they were today. Another shared how deeply they needed what was shared today as they were still in the midst of processing the intersection of their identity and their faith. Another shared how RHM had played a central role in their ability to continue in their faith and still live authentically in their truth

about themselves. A local minister from the Lutheran Church was also present who expressed gratitude and genuine sense of affirmation as they were also about to share similar insights with their congregation this past weekend. As I sat there and listened I thought back to RHM's evolution into an affirming and welcoming ministry. I thought of the heavy toll it took as we lost both friends and support as a result. I thought of the seminar cancellations we had endured. And then I was struck with the overwhelming conclusion as I sat there listening to the affirmation of those around the room— *it's all been worth it*. The beauty of those in that room at that moment and the stories of their journey made our journey as a ministry worth every moment.

For those of you who support Renewed Heart Ministries, I simply cannot thank you enough. I wish you could have been beside me to experience the testimonies of how our work here at RHM had been such a source of hope and healing to those around the room. As I listened to each person share, I also thought of you and how much I value you in enabling us to continue doing what we do. We here at RHM could not exist without your support. Together we are making a difference. Together we are touching lives both in the here in now and for eternity. So from each of us here, thank you.

And thank you to those of you at F.U.E.L., too! I drove away with so much hope for the future from my time spent with you.

Another world is possible.

In fact, it's not only possible, we see it's beginning in communities like yours.

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.

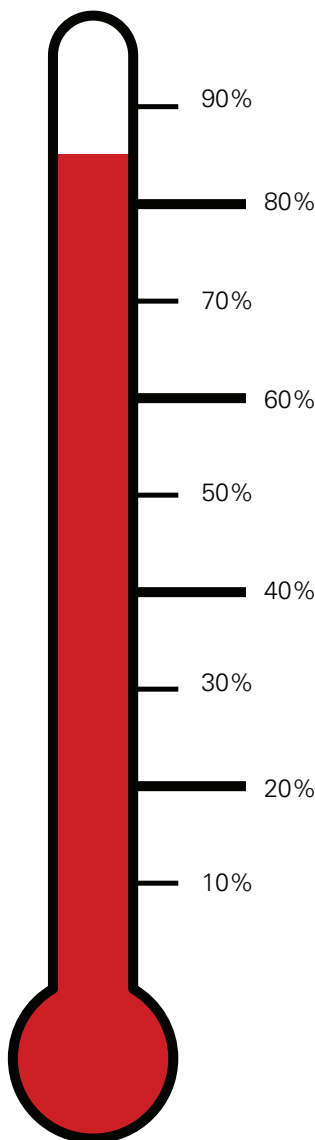
2018 Annual Budget Goal:
\$183,206.00

**January-December's
Budget Goal:**
\$183,206.00

**January-December's
Contributions Received:**
\$153,855.16

December's Budget Goal:
15,267.00

**December's Contributions
Received:**
\$33,559.78



**To support our work and help us grow,
go to renewedheartministries.com and click “donate.”**



Have you benefited from RHM's work?

We at Renewed Heart Ministries are asking our followers to share their stories of how RHM has been a blessing to you. We believe every person's story matters and every person's voice has value. Sharing our stories is one of the ways that we bring change and heal our world. Hearing one another's stories empowers us to let go of our fear of one another and enter into compassion. Listening to the diverse experiences of one another's lives leads us to replace insecurity with a much broader understanding of each other and our larger world.

We want to hear your story! And if you give us permission, we may feature your story in one of our upcoming newsletter issues so your story can help others, too! (But only if you give us permission.)

Will you share your story with us?

Send your story of how you have been positively impacted by the ministry of Renewed Heart Ministries by emailing info@renewedheartministries.com.

We're looking forward to hearing from you.

The “Jesus For Everyone” podcast

New episodes every Friday!

A weekly podcast where we talk about the intersection of faith and societal justice and what a first-century, Jewish prophet of the poor from Galilee might have to offer us today in our work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation.

renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts



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.

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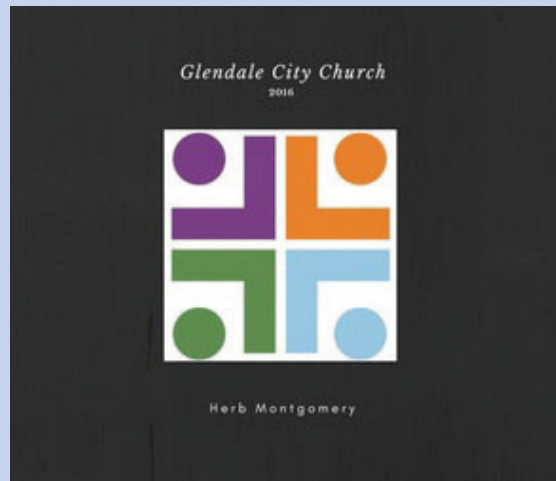


Featured Presentation

Healing Our World by Herb Montgomery

Jesus set an example of being a source of healing in our world. This month we want to feature one of our presentations by that same title. What does it mean to live in the reality of being touched by the sufferings of those around us? How can we sustainably work together to make a difference? What would a world changed by the values we

find in the Jesus story look like? These are questions explored in this month's presentation. It's our hope that your heart will be renewed and that you will be inspired to action as you listen to this month's featured presentation – ***Healing Our World***.



"Christians did not change their minds about the solar system because they lost respect for their Christian forebears or for the authority of Scripture. They changed their minds because they were confronted with evidence their predecessors had never considered."

Matthew Vines

God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of
Same-Sex Relationships, p. 24

#faithfullyLGBT

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