

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



αwakenings

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



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Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

**“Make a tree good
and its fruit will be good,
or make a tree bad
and its fruit will be bad,
for a tree is recognized
by its fruit.”**

Matthew 12:33



by Herb Montgomery

(This is part one of a very important multi-part series. To continue this series go to renewedheartministries.com/Eights/02-22-2019)

“And yet I’m torn when I watch the toll it takes on my LGBTQ friends to repeatedly explain these passages. Speaking about them does not have the same emotional cost for me as it does for them. Perhaps I have been a little too silent. I haven’t been silent in my affirmation. But I may have been too silent on some of the ways I arrive at affirmation. So this week and next, I want to amplify two voices on this topic.”

In the last month, I’ve spent the last two weekends in the company of LGBTQ Christian communities. Every time I spend time with communities like these, I am deeply moved by their compassion, insight, and wisdom. The people I’ve met have always failed to match the mischaracterizations that homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic Christian communities assign to them. I walk away from each experience with a deeper understanding of my own faith and what it means for me to follow Jesus today our work of love, compassion, action, and justice.

During these visits I bumped into a high school friend who I haven’t seen since graduation. He told me of his sister, a

deeply Christian lesbian woman, who recently married the love of her life, a pastor. On the morning of her wedding, her mother sent her a very ugly email. This mother, who had refused to attend the wedding, wrote this message to her daughter: “What you’re doing today makes me want to go jump off a bridge.”

When I heard this story I sat aghast. What is it about anti-LGBTQ Christianity that causes parents to so deeply reject and shame their own children? I have yet to understand this.

For many Christian parents, discovering their child is attracted to those of the same sex or identifies with a different gender than the one on their birth certificate begins their journey of discovering that everything their faith tradition has taught them of the LGBTQ community has been deeply misinformed at best and intentionally maligning at worst. They discover they were wrong.

But far more parents in these same faith traditions don’t make this journey. Far more often, parents reject their own children in order to be faithful to their anti-LGBTQ faith. Religion can be a powerful force of good in the world. It can also be a powerful force of the worst kinds of evil.

This week I want us to consider a story from the gospels of Mark and Matthew where Jesus was also mischaracterized and maligned. Jesus has strong words here for those who malign that which is holy, just, and good and call it evil.

“But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.’ Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your

words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:24-37; see also Mark 3:23-29

In this story, Jesus teaches the principle of knowing a tree by its fruit. His community had ways to interpret their sacred texts that could have given them ample basis to reject him. But there were also other ways to interpret those same sacred texts that would have freed them to embrace him and his life-giving teachings.

How do we know if our interpretations of our sacred text, in any religion, are moving in the right direction? Jesus tells us in this story: What is the fruit of your interpretation? If the tree is good, its fruit will be good. If the tree is bad, its fruit will be as well.

While I was in Arizona last month, a sincere questioner asked me how I interpret the Bible's passages that contemporary homophobic and biphobic Christians use to scare people away from affirming LGBTQ people. For a long time, I've refrained from debating these passages. A dear friend of mine calls such debates "text hockey." I've also not wanted to be another straight, cisgender male getting air-time to speak on passages that LGBTQ people have been speaking and writing on for decades now. I didn't want to take up space when I believe others' voices need to be heard right now.

And yet I'm torn when I watch the toll it takes on my LGBTQ friends to repeatedly explain these passages. Speaking about them does not have the same emotional cost for me as it does for them. Perhaps I have been a little too silent. I haven't been silent in my affirmation. But I may have been too silent on some of the ways I arrive at affirmation.

So this week and next, I want to amplify two voices on this topic. First is the excellent work of Matthew Vines, a voice in the LGBTQ community that Jesus followers should be listening to. The second is James Brownson, a parent of a child in the LGBTQ community.

I want to share their work with you so that each of us can do our own homework, putting in the energy to read, study, and grapple before we

ask someone in the Christian LGBTQ community to answer questions they have already answered multiple times and in multiple ways. These discussions are not academic for them. They are personally invested and many are tired of continually arguing about their existence. They already exist and have callings to pursue. It's up to you to how you respond. With that said, I want to offer some help to those who are sincerely searching, doing their homework, and wanting direction.

Matthew Vines' *God and the Gay Christian* is very readable. It's not written for scholars but for average people. Brownson's book, *The Bible, Gender, and Sexuality* is a definitive work on affirming Christian theology. It played a significant role in my own journey learning about affirming theology.

As Vines reminds us, "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" (p. 24). He also writes, "The telescope didn't lead Christians to reject Scripture. It simply led them to clarify their understanding of Scripture" (ibid. p. 38).

Certainly there are multiple ways texts can be interpreted. We must reach for the most life-giving choices when possible. What are the fruit of the interpretations we choose? We must be honest about the fruit that is born from homophobic and biphobic theologies. We must also be honest about the life-giving fruit of our Christian LGBTQ siblings' affirming theology. The life-giving fruit of their affirming theology is something we cannot afford to ignore.

Jesus said that it's one thing to mistake an evil thing good, and quite another to label something that's holy, just, and good evil. Jesus called the latter unpardonable.

So next week, we'll begin in the book of Genesis and progress through the texts Christians typically use to harm our LGBTQ friends, relatives, and neighbors. Each text will be well worth our time to explore. I'm so glad you're here with us on this journey.

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit." (Matthew 12:33)

HeartGroup Application

In your HeartGroups this week, discuss the meaning of these two words—*intrinsic* and *imposed*.

1. Have you ever experienced imposed rules within a community (religious or secular) prohibiting actions that you knew had no negative intrinsic result?
2. Have you ever experienced a lack of concern, acceptance or even encouragement of attitudes and actions that you knew to intrinsically bring harm or bear destructive fruit?
3. Discuss both of these experiences within your group this week. What are the differences between actions to which are added imposed results such as imposed penalties or affirmation, and actions that have their own intrinsically harmful or beneficial results? Is there a place for imposed rules and consequences when properly associated with actual intrinsically destructive choices? Can imposed rules be abused? Can they be misapplied in ways that label things as bad or harmful that can be actually good or at least neutral? What can your group learn from this discussion? How can your group become a healthier community that bears life-giving fruit, itself? How can your HeartGroup community impact your larger community in life-giving ways as well?

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

Wherever you are today, keep living in love, compassion, action and justice.

Another world is possible. I love each of you dearly. ■

Book of the Month for March 2019

Just Mercy
by Bryan Stevenson

One of the gospel elements of Jesus' ministry according to Luke was to declare "freedom for the prisoners." (Luke 4.18)

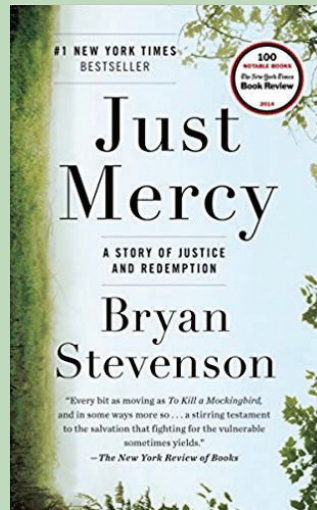
#1 NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER

A powerful true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to fix our broken system of justice—from one of the most brilliant and influential lawyers of our time.

Named one of the Best Books of the Year by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Seattle Times*, *Esquire* & *Time*.

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The case drew Bryan into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinksmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever.

Just Mercy is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer's coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has



defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

- Winner of the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction
- Winner of the NAACP Image Award for Nonfiction
- Winner of a Books for a Better Life Award
- Finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize
- Finalist for the Kirkus Reviews Prize
- An American Library Association Notable Book

"Every bit as moving as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and in some ways more so... a searing indictment of American criminal justice and a stirring testament to the salvation that fighting for the vulnerable sometimes yields."
—David Cole,
The New York Review of Books

"Searing, moving... Bryan Stevenson may, indeed, be America's Mandela."
—Nicholas Kristof,
The New York Times

"You don't have to read too long to start cheering for this man... The message of this book... is that evil can be overcome, a difference can be made. *Just Mercy* will make

you upset and it will make you hopeful."

—Ted Conover,
The New York Times Book Review

"Inspiring... a work of style, substance and clarity... Stevenson is not only a great lawyer, he's also a gifted writer and storyteller."
—*The Washington Post*

"As deeply moving, poignant and powerful a book as has been, and maybe ever can be, written about the death penalty."
—*The Financial Times*

"Brilliant."
—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Not since Atticus Finch has a fearless and committed lawyer made such a difference in the American South. Though larger than life, Atticus exists only in fiction. Bryan Stevenson, however, is very much alive and doing God's work fighting for the poor, the oppressed, the voiceless, the vulnerable, the outcast, and those with no hope. *Just Mercy* is his inspiring and powerful story."
—John Grisham

"Bryan Stevenson is one of my personal heroes, perhaps the most inspiring and influential crusader for justice alive today, and *Just Mercy* is extraordinary. The stories told within these pages hold the potential to transform what we think we mean when we talk about justice."
—Michelle Alexander, author of
The New Jim Crow

[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.]



Photo by Nicole Honeywill on Unsplash

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.



Sign up for RHM's *free* resources delivered right to your inbox!

- Daily email Quotations
- weekly email articles
- podcasts
- ministry updates
- monthly newsletters –and more!

Sign up now at renewedheartministries.com so you don't miss a thing!

Schedule

MARCH 2, 2019

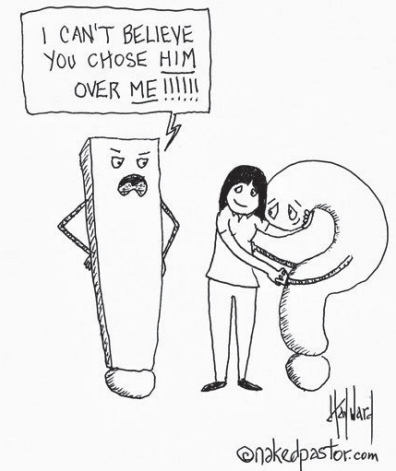
Finding Jesus
Glendale, CA, USA
304.520.0030

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



Quotable Quotes

"A protest against injustice and violence is incomparably more valuable if it comes entirely from people who have been prompted to it purely by sentiments of humanity and a love of justice."

– Albert Einstein;
The World As I See It



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 worshipping 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.

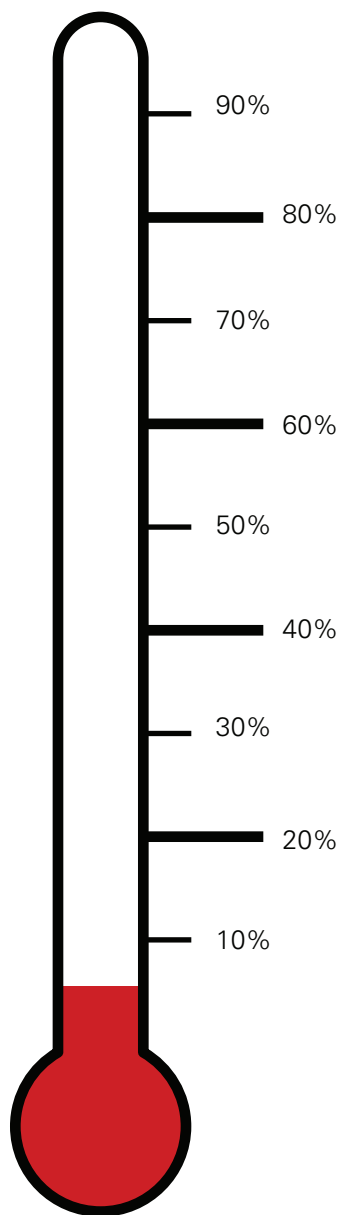
The RHM team, in any given month, consists of a small team of 10–12 people working either full-time, part-time, or as volunteers dedicating hundreds of hours to make what we do possible. If you find blessing, encouragement, and renewal here, please consider becoming one of our Monthly Partners with a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

**2019 Annual Budget Goal:
\$185,000.00**

**January's Budget Goal:
\$15,417.00**

**January's Contributions
Received:
\$9,377.04**

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



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 rawpixel-1301234-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.

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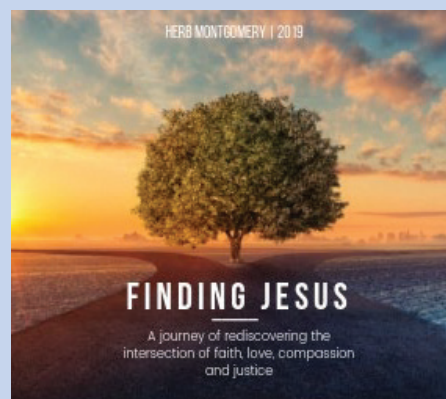


Featured Presentation

A decade ago now, a book Herb had written entitled *Finding the Father* was published. It chronicled the curious journey of his surprising discovery of the man who is his father. Using his personal story as a foundation, *Finding the Father* then went on to straight forwardly challenge many of the common assumptions many Christians make when we refer to "God" or "our heavenly Father."

Five years after *Finding the Father* was published, Herb would embark on another journey. This one unexpected and unplanned for. This new journey would lead to deep and transformational discoveries for his own life, an earnest crisis in his own faith, and an experience he now refers to as *Finding Jesus*. (This is also the title of his upcoming book that chronicles this new journey, coming out later this year.)

This month, listen to the first presentation of a new series by the same name – ***Finding Jesus*** by Herb Montgomery.



"Moreover, we must learn that passively to accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and thereby to become a participant in its evil."

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

