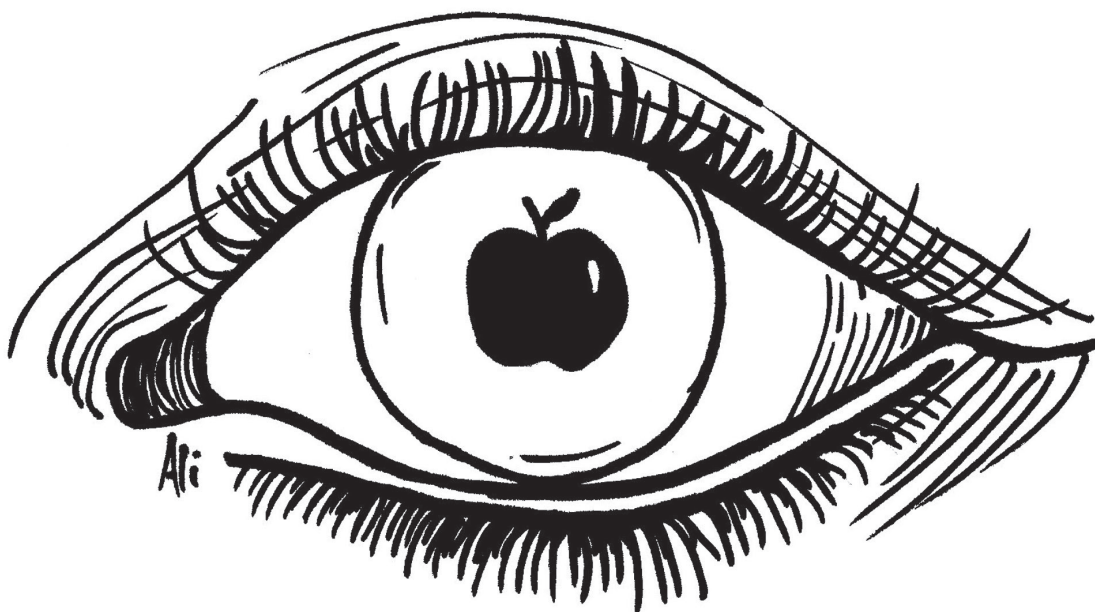


RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



Awakenings

∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ AUGUST 2022 ∴



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@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

"What Christian stereotypes about others are we being called to subvert in our societal context? What are those stereotypes rooted in? Are they rooted in bias and bigotry toward a different gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, education, economic status, or some other category? What stereotypes about those different from you have you, from your own experience, found to be staggeringly untrue?"



The Subversive and Transgressive Call to Love Our Neighbor

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of Luke:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care

of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

Some rhetoric and other elements of the Jesus stories have not aged well, but this week's reading is one reason I still hold onto the Jesus story. This week's section displays the heart of the moral philosophy of the Jesus of the gospels, a moral philosophy that I believe still has intrinsic value as we seek to be compassionate, just, safe humans today.

A version of the passage is found in each synoptic gospel as well as the Gospel of Thomas:

"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength,

and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions." (Mark 12:28-34)

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40)

"Jesus says: 'Love your brother [sic] like your life! Protect him [sic] like the apple of your eye!'" (Gospel of Thomas 25)

Most historical Jesus scholars agree, given Rabbi Hillel's influence in 1st Century Judaism, that the Hillellian practice of interpreting Torah through love (of God and neighbor) was the Jewish interpretive school Jesus was following here.

Jesus named the second greatest commandment as Leviticus 19's command to love one's neighbor as yourself. The context of this command in Leviticus shows that its "love" was much more than sentimentality. This love was also economic and political. Loving

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...Neighbor continued from page 2

one's neighbor in meant prohibiting the oppression and exploitation of people Israel's society had made vulnerable (see Leviticus 19:9-17).

Because of this, those of us who seek to follow the moral philosophy of Jesus today have a strong precedent for interpreting our sacred texts through the interpretive lens of love and applying that ethic of love politically, socially, and economically.

Recently, I was in Lexington, Kentucky, during a denominational pastors convention. I was not there as a conference attendee, but worked along-side Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International to call for LGBTQ inclusion and provide pastors with LGBTQ-affirming resources that their denomination refuses to provide. While I was there, I attended a presentation by Alicia Johnston, a pastor within that tradition who was fired when she publicly came out as bisexual. Her presentation introduced her new book *The Bible and LGBTQ Adventists*.

Alicia shared an example in her talk that resonated deeply with me. Today, she said, LGBTQ-affirming theologians often use love as the lens through which to interpret and understand their sacred text, while non-affirming theologians use the sacred text (interpreted through their own social location) to define what "love" and "loving" mean.

For those who may be tempted to imagine that these two interpretive options are both viable, their fruits are not the same. One is life-giving and life-affirming while the other has a long history of producing harmful definitions of love that have proven lethal. The lethal results of prioritizing the text over an ethic of love should give us all pause.

This story also has some unique elements.

Luke's gospel is the only gospel that adds to the love-based interpretation of Torah the story of the good Samaritan, a story that shows how this lens was to be lived.

Luke's Jesus applies the ethic of love by applying it even outside of his own community. This story uses the then

long-held tensions between people in Judea and people in Samaria, once the capital city of the Northern Israelite tribes. This story turns the commandment to love one's neighbor on its head with a Samaritan neighbor modeling the ethic of compassion for others.

Jesus' story is both subversive and transgressive. Jesus subverts his society's stereotypes about Samaritans and transgresses the strongly held boundary between "us" and "them." The Samaritan shows compassion through his actions toward someone who had been beaten, robbed and left for dead. In the story, this happens after the political and religious representatives from that person's own region had passed him by. The Samaritan in the story transgresses social and political boundaries to practice this ethic of love, demonstrating a larger application of "neighbor" that include Judeans as well as Samaritans. And so the Samaritan becomes an example of enlarging neighborly love to include "them" as well as "us," and Jesus calls those in Judean society to practice the same love as the Samaritan does.

I love this story because the Samaritan practices a universal love ethic. In this story, this is deeply transgressive of framing the Samaritan as morally inferior.

There is so much that we can glean from this story today.

What Christian stereotypes about others are we being called to subvert in our societal context?

What are those stereotypes rooted in? Are they rooted in bias and bigotry toward a different gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, education, economic status, or some other category?

What stereotypes about those different from you have you, from your own experience, found to be staggeringly untrue?

How does the ethic of love of neighbor call us to transgress our community's boundary of "us" and "them?"

Whether we think of political, religious, or social communities, what does it look like for us to lean into boundary-transgressing practices of defining our "neighbor?"

What does genuine authentic love look like once our definition of "neighbor" has been enlarged?

Lastly, what else are you reading in this week's story? Who else does this story invoke for you?

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Photo by Nina Strehl on Unsplash

RHM's Recommended Reading for August

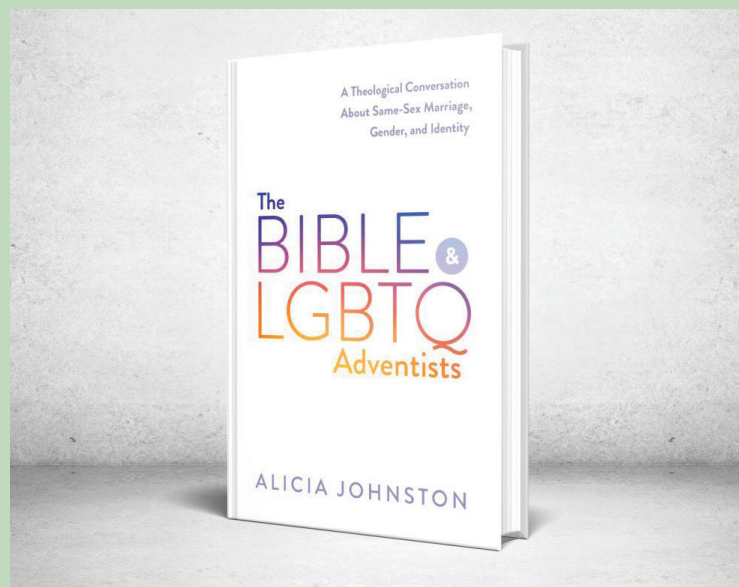
The Bible and LGBTQ Adventists by Alicia Johnston

Many are dissatisfied with the pastoral care and theological depth of the church's response to the LGBTQ community, most of whom struggle and leave our churches. Increasingly, their friends and family also walk out the doors of our churches forever. They don't see the love of God in our theology or behavior. If the Bible is our rule of faith and practice, is there something there to help us?

The Bible and LGBTQ Adventists answers this question with a resounding, "Yes!" And in a surprising way. The big claim is this: Full affirmation of same-sex marriage and transgender identity is the most biblical approach.

Despite this audacious claim, don't expect a controversial style. It's written as a theological conversation, not an argument. Those who are unconvinced of the book's thesis will still have gained knowledge, understanding, and tools to navigate this conversation.

You can order your copy at <https://aliciajohnston.com/>



Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!

"I've experienced paradigm shifts in my thinking that are transforming my spiritual journey."

That's what one participant recently wrote. Each Wednesday evening, Glendale City Church hosts a Zoom-HeartGroup led by Herb Montgomery. Our discussion each week will focus on the content in Renewed Heart Ministries weekly eSight articles and the *Jesus For Everyone* podcast published each Friday. The time of each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific/10:00 p.m. Eastern.

Email us at: info@renewedheartministries.com for the link for the Zoom meeting.

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HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. What boundary transgressing definition of "neighbor" is this week's story bringing to mind for you? Discuss with your group.
3. What can you do this week, big or small, to continue setting in motion the work of shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone?

Thanks for checking in with us today.

Right where you are, keep living in love, choosing compassion, taking action, and working toward justice.

I love each of you dearly. ■

SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



Recent Posts from RHM's "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos

Articles posted each week at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/



Sharing More Than We Need (Part 1 of 3)

"We are socialized by our U.S. culture to be uneasy here. Lean into this discomfort."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/sharing-more-than-we-need-part1/

Sharing More Than We Need (Part 2 of 3)

"In the story, when we find ourselves with more than what we ourselves need to thrive, then rather than building bigger barns to store that wealth, it is time for something else."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/sharing-more-than-we-need-part2/

Sharing More Than We Need (Part 3 of 3)

"When we do this, we are creating a new world, setting in motion a world of different quality."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/sharing-more-than-we-need-part3/



The Pain of Unanswered Prayer (Part 1 of 3)

"For many people, this week's reading brings up painful memories and deep questions about unanswered prayers."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/pain-unanswered-prayer-part1/

The Pain of Unanswered Prayer (Part 2 of 3)

"This prayer is a patient expression of longing for some other iteration of our present world. It is a prayer that this world, with all its injustice, violence, and hurt, will be put right."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/pain-unanswered-prayer-part2/

The Pain of Unanswered Prayer (Part 3 of 3)

"The conflict between what we think we are supposed to believe and the way things are causes a deep need for resolution that many never find."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/pain-unanswered-prayer-part3/



Jesus, Politics, and the Rights of Cis Women, Trans People and Non-binary Folk (Part 1 of 3)

"Mary chooses to transgress patriarchal, gender binary, gender role assumptions. The story also lauds her as having done a good thing!"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/jesus-politics-rights-cis-women-trans-people-nonbinary-folk/

Jesus, Politics, and the Rights of Cis Women, Trans People and Nonbinary Folk (Part 2 of 3)

"This is a strong message and should be weighed carefully by all Christian communities and institutions that relegate women in ministry to some other designation than those open to men."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/jesus-politics-rights-cis-women-trans-people-nonbinary-folk-part2/

Jesus, Politics, and the Rights of Cis Women, Trans People and Nonbinary Folk (Part 3 of 3)

"Adults a generation from now will value those different from them according to the way their society's laws socialized them to."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/jesus-politics-rights-cis-women-trans-people-nonbinary-folk-part3/

continued on page 6

Social Jesus continued from page 5***The Subversive and Transgressive Call to Love Our Neighbor (Part 1 of 3)***

"Given Rabbi Hillel's influence in 1st Century Judaism, the Hillellian practice of interpreting Torah through love was the Jewish interpretive school being used here."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/subversive-transgressive-call-love-neighbor-part1/

The Subversive and Transgressive Call to Love Our Neighbor (Part 2 of 3)

"Affirming theologians often use love as the lens through which to interpret and understand their sacred text, while non-affirming theologians use the sacred text (interpreted through their own social location) to define what "love" and "loving" mean."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/subversive-transgressive-call-love-neighbor-part2/

The Subversive and Transgressive Call to Love Our Neighbor (Part 3 of 3)

"Whether we think of political, religious, or social communities, what does it look like for us to lean into boundary-transgressing practices of defining our "neighbor?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/07/subversive-transgressive-call-love-neighbor-part3/



New episodes every Friday!

The Jesus For Everyone podcast.

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 offers us today in our work of compassion, love and justice.

renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts



Are you taking advantage of all of RHM's *free* resources?

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renewedheartministries.com
and click "Sign Up!"

Renewed Heart Ministries is a nonprofit organization working for a world of love and justice. We need your support to impact lives and provide the kind of resources and analysis RHM offers.

Intersections between faith, love, compassion, and justice are needed today more than ever.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Renewed Heart Ministries, today.

To do so online go to renewedheartministries.com and click "Donate." Or if you prefer to make a donation by mail, our address is:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

And to those of you out there who are already supporting this ministry, I want to say thank you. We continue being a voice for change because of your support.

**2022 Projected Budget Goal:
\$185,000.00**

**Donations Received
June 2022:
\$4,529.12**

**Donations Received
January through June:
\$32,513.45**

**Whether you give
\$5 or \$5,000,
every amount helps us
continue our work.**

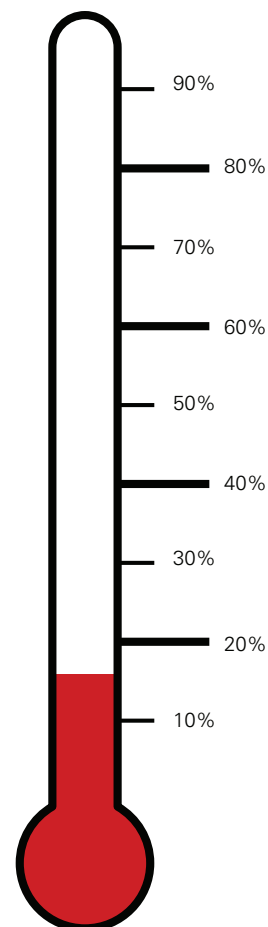


Photo by Armin Rimoldi on Pexels

Quotable Quotes

"We can come to know the world as paradise when our hearts and souls are reborn through the arduous and tender task of living rightly with one another and the earth. Generosity, nonviolence, and care for one another are the pathways into transformed awareness. Knowing that paradise is here and now is a gift that comes to those who practice the ethics of paradise. This way of living is not Utopian. It does not spring simply from the imagination of a better world but from a profound embrace of this world. It does not begin with knowledge or hope. It begins with love." — Rita Nakashima Brock & Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parkera; *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*, p. 409

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.

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.



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

"It may be true that you can't legislate integration, but you can legislate desegregation. It may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless. It may be true that the law can't make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important also. So while the law may not change the hearts of men, it does change the habits of men. And when you change the habits of men, pretty soon the attitudes and the hearts will be changed. And so there is a need for strong legislation constantly to grapple with the problems we face."

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
 UCLA on April 27, 1965

