



Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::::: Volume 9 :::::: Issue 7 ::::::



Inside This Issue:

Page 2

Blessed Are You Who Are Poor... (My Trip to Brazil)

Page 4

Ministry Update:
Narrative Christus Victor
Roseburg, OR, USA

Page 5

Schedule

RHM's FREE Podcasts
Are Going Around
the World

Page 6

Ministry Update:
Kinship Kampmeeting
Pomona, CA, USA

Page 7

HeartGroups:
Kapolei Heartgroup
Kapolei, HI, USA

Page 8

Testimonies
Featured Presentation

Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901
Phone: 304.520.0030
Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

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Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

“Looking at his disciples, he said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 6:20)



Blessed Are You Who Are Poor...

(My Trip to Brazil)

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

“Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

– Isaiah;
Isaiah 1:17

It's good to be back home! I truly loved my time in Brazil. It is a very beautiful place, and the hearts of its people are the most beautiful.

I encountered two polar contrasts during my trip: the severe poverty of so many, and the equally shocking, extreme, generous nature of their sharing with one another. I saw that sharing even among the poorest.

As many are aware, when colonialism “ended” in many of the developing countries, another form of oppression took its place: economic oppression. The Empires that had settled in many of these areas passed on their debts to these fledgling countries as they gained their independence. Starting off deeply indebted to those who had previously ruled them, these nations gained independence, but not freedom. Many of these countries then turned to the World Bank, the IMF, and other power brokers of the new global economy for help. The international banks, the IMF, took the form of loans with terms and conditions that would leave more than half of each country's resources going to debt repayment rather than internal development.

Brazil, for example, owes \$1,420,331,037,715 to so called “first world countries” today. Every year, Brazil's debt incurs \$138,250,530,000 in interest. That's \$4384 per second. This debt amounts to 56.08% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), which is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services Brazil produces in its borders in a year. So most of Brazil's income repays debt that it wasn't even responsible for incurring in the first place, and doesn't maintain the infrastructure for taking care of its 202,768,562 citizens.

Imagine what *your* world would look like if your municipalities were, overnight, depleted of their resources to pay for water, sewer, trash pickup, road maintenance, emergency personnel, and law enforcement.

Manaus, the place I visited first, has virtually no middle class now. The very few wealthy and affluent live alongside masses upon masses of the severely poor.

I noticed this on Friday when I arrived. But that was just the start of my adventure.

Shortly after I arrived in Brazil, I was informed that my meetings in Manaus and Novo Airão had both been cancelled at the last minute. I learned that one of the “saints,” after seeing that I would be speaking in their church, Googled my name and found out I was a friend to the LGBTIQ community. Discovering my love—and I quote—“for the gays,” rumors also began to circulate that I drank, smoked, ate pork, did drugs, had multiple wives, and did not believe in the Holy Spirit. (You can't make this stuff up.) Those of you who're not familiar with the teetotaling, kosher nature the Adventist church, please know that just saying that someone drinks, smokes, and eats pork is enough to marginalize an Adventist. Every other rumor was gratuitous. My meetings had been scheduled to begin that first weekend, but they would at best be delayed, and at worst be permanently cancelled.

So I woke up early the next morning and attended the church where I'd been scheduled to speak. Sunday, I spent becoming familiar with the city, and then Monday afternoon, I had an appointment with the Conference President.

The president and I were not the only ones present at this meeting. Accompanying me was my host and an interpreter. It turned into a short meeting, and the president did not discuss why our meetings had been delayed. We did discuss a church policy concerning guest speakers

from other countries, and so I had the opportunity to remind everyone present that I was only in the country by their prior invitation. The meetings had been approved a year previously, and we had cooperated with every stipulation they had made in that time.

After the meeting—Im still not sure what made the difference—the administration approved our meetings for the second

cont'd on page 3

Blessed Are You... cont'd from page 2

time. They would now begin on Wednesday evening. Faced with four lost days, I started editing my presentations. I'd already edited them severely for translation, and now I had to cut the series in half. As a result of the delays, however, the Manaus series was poorly attended until the last presentation, when the house was packed.

I chose Luke 4:18-19 as my focus for the week. In these texts, we discover Jesus, the liberator of the oppressed, embracer of the outcast, and proponent of a shared table. Those who did attend repeatedly told us how thankful they were for the meetings, and they shared the different paradigm shifts they had each experienced through encountering Jesus' teaching in a refreshing new light.

The next series was about 120 miles northwest of Manaus, in Novo Airão. Buy bus that is about a four hours distance. This area was much more economically stressed than Manaus.

For this group, my choice to present Jesus as a first century poor Jewish teacher (Luke 2.24 cf. Leviticus 12.8) who came with *good news* for his fellow poor resonated deeply. We focused on Jesus' words in the Synagogue in Luke 4 (emphasis added):

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for those with prison-blindness, to set the oppressed free."

Never have I encountered first-hand just how important it is to couch Jesus' ministry in the context of his liberation of the poor. The Novo Airão group showed me how much.

As we reflected on Luke 4, we explored four themes together.

1. How Jesus taught the poor to survive.

Jesus gave the poor a way to transcend "worry" and "fear" by combining what they did have and choosing to embrace, share with, and take care of one another. (See Luke 12:13-34; Matthew 5:25-34)

2. How Jesus empowered the poor and oppressed to move beyond survival.

Jesus taught the poor how to affirm themselves by nonviolently confronting oppressors and by staying rooted in enemy-love and enemy-transformation. John Dear, who has done a tremendous amount of work in nonviolence over the years, states: "Nonviolence is active love that seeks justice and peace for the whole human race, beginning with the poor and oppressed. It is the all-encompassing love that embraces every human being on the planet, refuses to kill anyone, and works for social justice for everyone." (See Luke 4:16-29; Matthew 5:38-42)



3. How Jesus rejected hierarchical structures in the community of his followers.

Jesus promoted equity, justice, and compassion for all. This insight resonated with the audience the most as many felt as if they were living lives at the bottom of political, economic, and religious structures. (See Matthew 20:25-28; Matthew 23:8-12)

4. How Jesus replaced systems of oppression and exclusion with a shared table.

As each one of us, along with our differences, encounter one another at Jesus' shared table, we become enabled to integrate all the many diverse experiences of life into a meaningful and coherent whole, producing a safer and more compassionate world for us all. (Luke 6:20-26; Luke 15:1, 25-32)

We ended this series with the ending of Jesus narrative. Jesus was crucified by the powers and systems that his teachings

threatened, and God said "NO" to that execution in the resurrection on Sunday morning. Jürgen Moltmann defines the resurrection as a Divine protest to the domination systems of our world. The early church also perceived the resurrection as a decisive clue that a new world, like a mustard seed placed in the ground and like leaven in dough, had begun with Jesus. (See Acts 13:32-33) In overwhelming clarity, we encountered, together, a Jesus who proclaimed that the Heart of the Universe was standing with those who, as a result of the way the present world is set up, are hurting, suffering, going hungry, falling asleep many nights in tears, oppressed, marginalized and subordinated. These are the majority of those who live in Novo Airão. And those who were present found renewed hope as decisions were made to embrace and to follow this Jesus.

On the last night of this second series, one of the more affluent members who attended shared with me this message in broken english:

"I had never looked at things this way before. Thank you so much for coming. I feel as if I cannot continue on the same way I had. If I am to embrace Jesus' shared table, things in my life where I'm participating in 'pyramids of oppression' and 'circles of exclusion' must change."

Over all, I view my trip to Brazil as a tremendous success for Jesus' new world. The response of the people to the stories and teachings of Jesus was breathtaking, especially in Novo Airão, and I believe the Novo Airão church took significant strides toward Jesus' new world of compassion and safety for everyone.

To those of you who were praying for this series here at home, thank you. Over the next two weeks the Novo Airão church will be conducting a local school building project: please keep praying for them.

And to each of you who has supported Renewed Heart Ministries, I can't thank you enough. You made it possible for me to go to Brazil and share with the people I met.

I take Jesus' words to his disciples, "Freely you have received, freely give" very

MINISTRY UPDATE

Narrative Christus Victor

Roseburg, Oregon

May 14–16, 2015

Few topics excite me more than reading the Jesus story through the narrative lens of the *Christus Victor* theory. Though there are many through which one can look at the Jesus story, this is one of my favorites. That's why I was excited when the church I was going to speak at in Oregon requested this topic themselves.

For those of you who may not be familiar with *Christus Victor*, or the more recent *Narrative Christus Victor*, this is an understanding of Jesus' life, teachings, execution, and resurrection as that which liberated humanity from its captivity to domination systems, whether of this world (naturalism) or the cosmos (apocalypticism). (I explain both of these in the series.)

It's an extremely helpful lens, which enables us to share the gospel of Jesus, within the Jesus narrative, in relevant ways within our post-Christian world today. And I love it! It has answered so many of the questions I grew up with as well concerning God, myself, and everyone else around me.

The church I was fortunate enough to be presenting at was the Turning Point Church in Roseburg, Oregon. First let me say that I absolutely loved the spirit I encountered at this church. It was warm, embracing, and encouraging. Over the course of the weekend, I also noticed the presence of a wide spectrum of periphery beliefs, all under one roof. In between presentations we had quite a few really enriching conversations. Each person was in process, just like me, sincerely trying to find relevant answers to some of life's most persistent questions. Sometimes it's just a matter of figuring out what

questions we should even be asking. And this weekend was no exception.

I will be posting the four presentations from this series next week, under the title *Narrative Christus Victor*. I began with a simplified overview of the various lenses through which the Jesus story is read, and then we looked at a brief summary of the world view of those in Jesus' time. The rest of the weekend we looked at why Jesus was executed, why His resurrection was such good news, and the relevance of Jesus' life, teachings, execution, and resurrection to even the naturalistic world view that many, by contrast with those of the first century, live in today. My hope is that the recordings of these four presentations will be just as much a blessing to you as they were to those who were present during the event.

Outside of the series, I also was able to reconnect with many friends that I hadn't seen face to face for years. To each of you who were there, thank you for traveling to this event. I miss my friends from the Northwest, and it was good to see each of you. For the new friends I made, let's keep in touch. We are in this together—living in love, listening with compassion, till the only world that remains is a world where love reigns.

Thank you to the Roseburg Church for having me. It was such a pleasure to be in your midst.

And for all of you who support Renewed Heart Ministries, thank you, too! Jesus taught us, *"Freely you have received, freely give."* We could not share as generously as we do without your partnership with us. Together we are enlarging what Jesus called, *"The Kingdom."*

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'"

— Jesus; Matthew 6:9–10

Quotable Quotes

*"Now that he is safely dead
Let us praise him
build monuments to his glory
sing hosannas to his name.*

*Dead men make such convenient
heroes:*

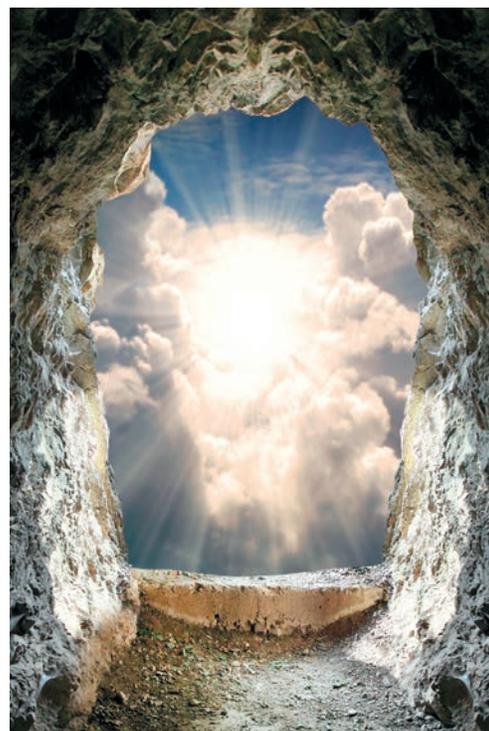
*They cannot rise to challenge
the images we would fashion
from their lives And besides, it is
easier to build monuments than
to make a better world.*

*So, now that he is safely dead we,
with eased consciences will teach
our children that he was a great
man...*

*knowing that the cause for which
he lived is still a cause and the
dream for which he died is still a
dream, a dead man's dream."*

— Carl Wendell Himes, Jr.
(for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

From Vincent Harding's
An Inconvenient Hero





Blessed Are You... cont'd from page 3

seriously. Renewed Heart Ministries is a not-for-profit ministry, and we never charge seminar fees for local work. We also make all of our resources available on the web so the people who need to hear this message can access it freely.

This means we are directly dependent on our monthly supporters as well as those who make one-time contributions: you help us to keep lifting up Jesus and his teachings in a hurting world. Jesus'

teachings have placed us on a path that leads to life rather than death, compassion rather than condemnation, and love rather than hate. Like Jesus, we believe our call is not *"to condemn the world."* Instead we do this work that the world, through Jesus and his teachings, *"might be healed"* (John 3:17).

I witnessed the healing nature of Jesus' teachings firsthand during my visit to Brazil. Jesus' words to the poor and oppressed, his uplifting of women in a patriarchal society, his embrace of the outcast and excluded, and even his self-affirming nonviolence resonated so deeply with those who participated in these two series of meetings that I, too, walked away having to agree with the Samaritans of Jesus' day: *"This man [Jesus] really is the Savior of the world."* (John 4:42)

Thank you for helping me to see and share that Savior. Till the only world that remains is world where love reigns, let's keep lifting Jesus up.

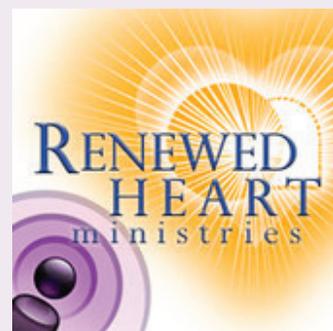
And to each of you who support the ministry of RHM as we reach our around the globe, thank you. ■

RHM's FREE Podcasts, Via The Internet, Are Going all Around The World!

We, at RHM, are receiving some profound feedback from all across the globe from those who are listening to our weekly podcasts via the internet. These are proving to be one of RHM's most effective (as well as efficient) means of sharing. Not everyone can attend one our seminars. Herb can only travel to so many churches every year, but the resources (both written and audio) that are right now being taken advantage of by folks, world wide, as well as the feedback we are receiving, is astounding!

Someone wise once said, *"Lean into where you see people responding to God's working!"* Please consider supporting RHM's weekly podcasts as we, together, continue to share Jesus' teachings in meaningful and effective ways. Till the only world that remains is a world where Love reigns.

Mark your donation "Podcasts."



Schedule

AUGUST 28 - 30, 2015

Adventist Fellowship
Tulsa, OK
United States
918.622.2444

SEPTEMBER 18 - 20, 2015

Walla Walla Men's Fellowship
Walla Walla, Washington
United States
509.382.3095

OCTOBER 2 - 4, 2015

Glendale City Church
Glendale, CA
United States
818.244.7241



MINISTRY UPDATE

Kinship Kampmeeting 2015

Pomona, CA

July 14-18, 2015

“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” - Jesus

I was privileged again to be able to take part in SDA Kinship’s annual Kampmeeting this summer. Last year’s meetings were held just outside Atlanta, GA, and this summer we met just outside of Los Angeles.

An Adventist theology professor gave the first presentation, and I have to admit that after listening to his first presentation, I had a total “theo-crush” on this man! Let me explain.

My first presentation was scheduled for the next morning and I was sweating it. I was going to be discussing how Jesus used Genesis 1 in Matthew 19 to subvert Genesis 2. To really see what Jesus was doing in Matthew 19, it takes more time to unpack Genesis 1 and 2 than I had for my presentation. So I sat down to listen to the speaker that first night and was in shock. His presentation was on Genesis 1 and 2, and the way he reframed those two chapters paved a highway for my presentation the next morning. And he did an infinitely better job with retelling these two chapters than I ever could have. I was in awe.

The four presentations I chose to share this year were:

1. *The Radically Inclusive Jesus*
2. *Pyramids, Circles and a Shared Table*
3. *The Jesus Story (The Divine Protest of the Resurrection)*
4. *Thurman’s Three Hounds*

I will be posting these four presentations soon on our website for those who were not able to attend this year.

SDA Kinship creates a safe space



for those who daily work to survive in a world where the majority has artificially defined normativity. That would be praiseworthy enough, but what I most thank Kinship for this year is taking my hand and ushering me into a world that exists beyond the thin veil of the majority. The dominant world is a world we think is real, but it’s a facade. There’s a much larger world where many who don’t fit easily into society’s “norm” live in every day. That is the real world, and I’m thankful to Kinship for opening my eyes to it. Thanks to Kinship, I’ve met an amazingly beautiful community of incredible people forced to live on the fringes of our society here in the West.

Each of you who support Renewed Heart Ministries, please listen to these four presentations. Listen all the way through to the last presentation where we close with Howard Thurman’s book *Jesus and the Disinherited* and the “three hounds of hell” that dog the souls of the oppressed.

This is a community whose voices have been excluded from most tables. Whenever anyone’s voices are excluded from a table, those at the table will inevitably shape a world that is neither safe nor compassionate for those missing. History teaches that those we seek to exclude today are those we will one day seek to exterminate : the fruit of wiping a community of people off the face of the earth tomorrow can be traced back to the seed of today’s exclusion.

Instead of the exclusive table, Jesus modeled a table he shared with those

on the fringes of his society. I believe it was because he understood the danger of exclusion that he formed those shared tables.

And so Jesus modeled a way toward a safer more compassionate world for us all.

That way is still here for our choosing.

I wish I could share with you all of the life-changing stories I heard during my time at Kampmeeting. I also wish I could recount the many stories of gratitude and appreciation from those who’ve chosen to follow the teachings of Jesus because of the work of Renewed Heart Ministries. Together we’re making a difference in the hearts of those whose lives have been damaged by Christianity and the Church. Together, we’re doing a work of healing and empowerment. We are making a difference especially for those whom the church has long excluded. Together we’re learning how to affirm our own value as those who bear the image of God and choose a world where love truly does win.

I want to thank the Kinship community for inviting me back this year. You continue to tell me the difference I’ve made for so many of you, but that difference is more than mutual. Because of my time with you, I will never look at people or the world the same way. You’ve helped me, too, to see Jesus in previously unperceived ways: you have changed my life forever. And I can’t thank you enough.

Till the only world that remains is a world where Love reigns, let’s keep choosing, together, a safer world for us all.

HeartGroups:

Kapolei HeartGroup

Kapolei, HI

July 24-25, 2015

“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.” (1 Corinthians 16:19, emphasis added.)

In ancient Hawaiian oral tradition, the world came into being through the three gods Kāne, Lono, and Kū. Kāne is the highest of the gods. It is also interesting to note that the worship of Kāne did not include sacrifice or ritual. Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui, who was raised in Ka‘ū, Hawaii, maintained that the early Hawaiian gods were benign. One Moloka‘i tradition follows this line of thought. Author and researcher Pali Jae Lee writes: *“During these ancient times, the only ‘religion’ was one of family and oneness with all things. The people were in tune with nature, plants, trees, animals, the ‘āina, and each other. They respected all things and took care of all things. All was pono.”* (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaiian_religion.)

Community or “oneness” was a central part of Hawaiian culture. The contemporary concept of Ohana can be traced back to this value.

The early Jesus movement within Judaism, with both its successes and failures, in attempting to apply the teachings of their Jesus, also placed community very close to the center of their values.



Lean, imaginatively, into the following passages:

“Greet also the church that meets at their house.” (Romans 16:5, emphasis added.)

“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.” (1 Corinthians 16:19)

“Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” (Colossians 4:15)

These were not institutionalized gatherings, but the gathering of those who were endeavoring to follow the teachings of Jesus, from which they together created a set of community-ethics, and who saw each other as valued siblings. They were trying to imitate what they perceived in Jesus’ shared table. It only took a few decades before debates over authority and hierarchy would change the early Jesus movement. The results of these detrimental changes are still with us today.

It is ironic to me that the early Jesus followers’ shared table was not too different from the early Hawaiians’ shared table. And yet it was later European Christians, having chosen hierarchical authority over a shared table, who landed on Hawaiian shores seeking to establish unjust political control over the indigenous population. They landed with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other.

Today, I consider myself blessed to know a group of Jesus followers on the island of Oahu who are abandoning Colonial forms of Christianity and embracing their Hawaiian roots, as well as their Christian roots and seeking to gather in the form of

a shared table again.

Being a guest in their HeartGroup I was asked to share something both Friday night after the community dinner as well as during the study time Saturday afternoon. After each short session I asked if local wisdom could be shared, with one boundary. Each voice was to be valued. No one was to argue with what anyone else would share. You could share your own thoughts on what I had shared, but you could not argue with the response of anyone else in the room. Again, each voice was to be valued and welcomed, recognizing that we are all at different stages of growth. We would be learning to sit comfortably with those differences. Each person’s perspective was to be valued.

It was a beautiful time of sharing. Deeper insights, sincere questions, and some really special breakthroughs were experienced by many in the group. It was not only a time of deconstructing a few harmful religious beliefs, it was a time of reconstructing and re-emphasizing values that help us along the way as we choose to create a safer more compassionate world for everyone.

This group holds a special place in my heart. We have journeyed together in our following Jesus over the last six years. We all began in very different places than where each of us is today. And we are still growing. Some of the testimonies I heard this week were from those whose previous religious expressions I know personally were oppressive, negative, and harmful both to themselves as well as those around them. Following Jesus today, in their own words have left them the “happiest they’ve ever been,” and with the overwhelming sense of “chains” being “loosed.”

Seeing the changes in the lives of those I have just been privileged to spend this week reminds me of why we do what we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries (RHM). It’s about liberating the hearts, minds and lives of those for whom harmful pictures of a god have done much damage. It’s about empowering those same lives to follow that Jewish teacher, choosing each day to create, both in big ways and small, Jesus’ more just, equitable and gracious world for us all.

It takes all of us. Thank you for supporting the work of RHM. Together we are making a difference.



Testimonies

"Your three part series [renewedheartministries.com/Esights/07-07-2014] touched my heart. There are not many out there who are saying what you are, and I just wanted to say that I appreciate your ministry. I'm teary eyed at the moment, and it's making it hard to write this. I will be sharing this with our fellowship group over the next several weeks. Our group consists of homeless men and women living out on the streets. I know the women are going to appreciate hearing this just as I have. God Bless!" -K

"I have a love/hate relationship with Herb and RHM. I love this ministry because it shows me God like I've never seen Him before, but I hate it at the same time because it challenges me to my core and calls to me to rethink things and ultimately to change. I totally get why Herb says that in his following Jesus, some days, he is just white knuckled. But no matter how much I'm challenged,

I want to thank you, Herb, truly for all you risk for the Kingdom. It has challenged and yet changed my view of God and my life forever." -KG

"Your message of the teachings of Christ along with your teachings of the words and culture used in biblical passages has changed my view of my heavenly Father so much. Thank very, very much." -C

"I am really interested in learning more about this model (Christus Victor). I looked into it once and was really intrigued, as it seems much more in alignment with a loving God." -DA

Featured Presentation

In the book of Luke and the book of Acts, the gospel is not that Jesus had died, but that he had been resurrected! We'd like to feature the third presentation from our *Narrative Christus Victor* series



for the month of August—*The Victory of Jesus* by Herb Montgomery. It is our prayer that your heart

would be liberated, healed and renewed as you listen to this month's presentation.

Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge. Jesus instructed us, "Freely you have received, freely give." We at RHM take this command very seriously. Philosophically we have a difficult time charging money to people for things Jesus taught us for free.

In order to do this, we are entirely dependent on the contributions of our supporters. If you would like to make a one-time gift or offer monthly support, please send your contributions to the following address:

Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Contributions can also be made online at:
www.renewedheartministries.com

*All donations receive a tax-deductible receipt.

Be sure to check out RHM's *FREE* resources at:
www.renewedheartministries.com