



## Inside This Issue:

### Page 2

*Kingdom Parables for  
Social Change*

### Page 3

*Thank You*

### Page 4

Recommended  
Reading for August

*Jesus for Everyone*  
Podcast

New Weekly  
YouTube Show

### Page 5

RHM's *Social Jesus*  
Blog on Patheos

### Page 7

Weekly Zoom  
HeartGroup  
Budget Thermometer

### Page 8

Upcoming Events  
RHM's Free Resources  
*Finding Jesus is Here!*

RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES  
P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901  
Phone: 304.520.0030  
Email: [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com)

#### Follow RHM!



@RenewedHeartMin



Renewed Heart Ministries

#### Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery



***“When we discover we have been wrong, that’s okay. That’s a good thing. We can make old, death-dealing interpretations give way to new, life-giving interpretations. We can hold on to old, life-giving interpretations too, and adopt new interpretations that we think are more life-giving as new information is discovered. When what we thought was life-giving turns out not to be, we can hold on to the good old, letting go of the bad old, and replace it with the new. The object is not to protect everything that is old, but to ask whether what we are believing and practicing is truly life giving for all.”***

# Kingdom Parables for Social Change

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of Matthew:

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied.

He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his store-room new treasures as well as old.” (Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52)

There are so many beautiful themes in this week’s reading for us to dive into. First let’s consider the language here that refers to Jesus’ vision for human

community as a “kingdom.”

Remember, Jesus’ gospel in these stories was not instructions for nor good news about a pathway to a post mortem heaven. Jesus’ gospel was good news that announced and called people to a new vision for human community in the here and now. A human community where those presently being marginalized and pushed to the undersides of society find a world that is safe, just, and compassionate for all.

## Kingdom

The term “kingdom” combined the imperial culture of the Roman empire with the restoration hopes of the indigenous Jewish people of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee living under Roman imperial colonization. It is the language of that time and place. Today we rightly recognize the kingdom language as hierarchical and patriarchal. It is my studied opinion that we would harmonize more with Jesus’ vision of community cast in the gospels if we referred to this community in more democratic terms, in ways reflected in the democratic principles practiced in the book of Acts by early Jesus communities.

I also argue that the cosmic, post resurrection Jesus became the King of the early Jesus communities. Kingdom imagery was intended to help the church replace any earthly “king,” and make way for a more egalitarian community. Consider the following:

“And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.” (Matthew 23.9-10)

This same principle could be applied: Don’t have kings among yourself, you have one King, Jesus. All of you are to relate to each other non hierarchically as equals:

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. (Matthew 23:8, emphasis added.)

Again, this language attempts to communicate egalitarian siblinghood and yet even this version only mentions “brothers.” Today, we might



## Thank You to all of our supporters.

If you would like to join them in supporting Renewed Heart Ministries' work you can do so by going to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and clicking donate.

say "brothers and sisters," or more simply "siblings." We can push this language to be more inclusive of women and non-binary, gender nonconforming, and other people, and still be in perfect harmony with the trajectory of the intention of the original egalitarian and non-hierarchical passage.

### Mustard

(See also Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19; Gospel of Thomas 20)

The parable of the mustard seed is a political parable, not a botanical one. Botanically, mustard don't grow into trees at all. They grow into shrubs of average size. This story is meant to be understood in the context of the political hopes of Jesus' Jewish community. Consider the promise made to this people in Ezekiel:

"This is what the Sovereign God says, 'I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches.'" (Ezekiel 17:22-23)

A tree being used as a metaphor for a kingdom or empire was common in the scriptures. Consider how Babylon itself was described with the same language.

"Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed...The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds—Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth." (Daniel 4:12, 20-22)

In saying that Jesus' vision for human community would ultimately grow from tiny beginnings to the fulfillment of Jewish hopes of restoration and independence, the gospel authors were appealing to the Jewish people's hopes in the midst of their imperial colonization by Rome.

This can be challenging for contemporary Christians to wrap their minds and hearts around, but the

hard work of reading the Jesus story from the perspectives of marginalized and excluded communities is work worth doing.

Calling Jesus' vision of human community a mustard seed was about more than its small beginnings. Most of the agricultural world at that time deemed the mustard plant a weed. So Jesus' kingdom vision for human community was being likened in this parable to a weed. This called out how Jesus' vision for what human community could be was deemed by the elite, powerful, propertied and privileged: a weed that must be speedily eliminated before it took over the imaginations of the masses.

### Yeast

(Luke 13:20-21; Thomas 96)

In the Passover traditions, leaven was a corrupting influence, and unleavened bread symbolized purity. So in this week's reading, Jesus' kingdom vision for human community is being likened to something that corrupted. Again, the elite, powerful, propertied and privileged considered this vision for human community that Jesus was casting a corrupting influence among the masses. If something wasn't done about it quickly, it would permeate the entire society that the elites were profiting off of.

Historically, democracy was seen as a corrupting influence in societies that practiced monarchy or other forms of hierarchy. Today, even non-authoritarian, more democratic forms of socialism and communism are deemed as a corrupting influence by global capitalists who profit off the masses. (Consider the history of U.S. policy in relation to Vietnam and Cuba.)

Jesus' love for the poor and his vision of a human community that practiced wealth redistribution, debt cancellation, resource sharing, and mutual aid inspired the poor and marginalized in his society, and benefitted those being exploited. It threatened the elites. Truly Jesus' preaching was corrupting leaven and a noxious weed to them.

*continued on page 6*

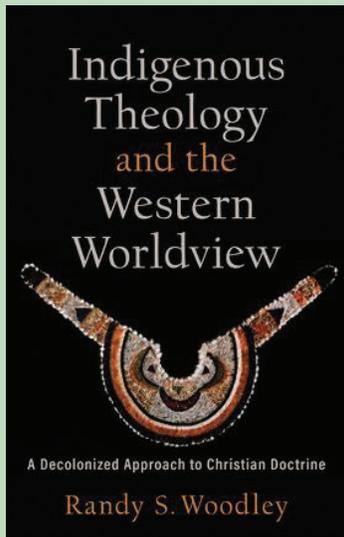
## August's Recommended Reading

***Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview: A Decolonized Approach to Christian Doctrine***

by **Randy S. Woodley**

This volume by a Cherokee teacher, former pastor, missiologist, and historian brings Indigenous theology into conversation with Western approaches to history and theology.

Written in an accessible, conversational style that incorporates numerous stories and questions, this book exposes the weaknesses of a Western worldview through a personal engagement



with Indigenous theology. Randy Woodley critiques the worldview that undergirds the North American church by dismantling assumptions regarding early North American histories and civilizations, offering a

comparative analysis of worldviews, and demonstrating a decolonized approach to Christian theology.

Woodley explains that Western theology has settled for a particular view of God and has perpetuated that basic view for hundreds of years, but Indigenous theology originates from a completely different DNA. Instead of beginning with God-created humanity, it begins with God-created place. Instead of emphasizing individualism, it emphasizes a corporateness that encompasses the whole community of creation. And instead of being about the next world, it is about the tangibility of our lived experiences in this present world. The book encourages readers to reject the many problematic aspects of the Western worldview and to convert to a worldview that is closer to that of both Indigenous traditions and Jesus.



***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](http://renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts)

## **New Weekly YouTube Show!**

***Just Talking*** with Herb and Todd

Each week, we'll be talking about the gospel lectionary reading for the upcoming weekend. We'll be talking about each reading in the context of love, inclusion, and societal justice. Our hope is that our talking will be just talking (as in justice) and that during our brief conversations each week you'll be inspired to also do more than just talking.

If you teach from the lectionary each week, or if you're just looking for some thoughts on the Jesus story from a more progressive perspective within the context of social justice, check it out, you might like it.

You can find the latest show on YouTube at: **@herbandtoddjusttalking**

Please Like, Subscribe, hit the Notification button, and leave us a comment. This will help us get this new YouTube channel off the ground. Thanks in advance for watching!



# SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



## Last Month's "Social Jesus" Blog Posts on Patheos



### ***The Kingdom, "Kingdom" Parables for Social Change Part 1***

Ironically, kingdom imagery was intended to help the church replace any earthly "king," and make way for a more egalitarian community.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/kingdom-kingdom-parables-for-social-change-part-1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/kingdom-kingdom-parables-for-social-change-part-1/)

### ***Mustard and Yeast, "Kingdom" Parables for Social Change Part 2***

In the stories, it threatened the status quo and was deemed as yeast, a corrupting leaven and mustard, a noxious weed. Does it today?

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/mustard-and-yeast-kingdom-parables-for-social-change-part-2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/mustard-and-yeast-kingdom-parables-for-social-change-part-2/)

### ***Old and New, "Kingdom" Parables for Social Change Part 3***

When what we thought was life-giving turns out not to be, we can hold on to the good old, letting go of the bad old, and replace it with new.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/old-new-kingdom-parables-for-social-change-part-3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/old-new-kingdom-parables-for-social-change-part-3/)



### ***A Problematic Passage, How Not to View the World Part 1***

When a problematic passage only appears

in one gospel, it gives me pause. We don't need to throw it out, but handle it with the utmost care.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/problematic-passage-how-not-to-view-the-world-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/problematic-passage-how-not-to-view-the-world-part1/)

### ***People as Weeds, How Not to View the World Part 2***

When we label someone as a weed, we never make it our practice to let them be. We always set out at once to weed them out.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/people-weeds-how-not-to-view-the-world-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/people-weeds-how-not-to-view-the-world-part2/)

### ***Exclusion, How Not to View the World Part 3***

If any are excluded in the just world we are working towards and creating, it will intrinsically be those who practice exclusion today.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/exclusion-how-not-view-world-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/exclusion-how-not-view-world-part3/)



### ***Obstruction, Part 1 of The Deceitfulness of Wealth***

Of all the temptations that could have been mentioned, the obstruction and deceitfulness of wealth is the one named.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/obstruction-part-1-deceitfulness-wealth/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/obstruction-part-1-deceitfulness-wealth/)

### ***Sharing, Part 2 of The Deceitfulness of Wealth***

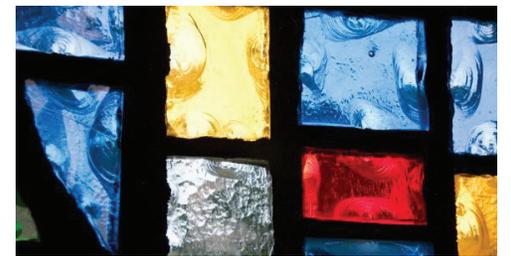
Every member of the community held a mutual commitment, sharing what they could to ensure everyone was cared for.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/sharing-deceitfulness-of-wealth-part2//](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/sharing-deceitfulness-of-wealth-part2//)

### ***Community, Part 3 of The Deceitfulness of Wealth***

These examples of community are deeply committed to democracy and al-so have strong social commitments to one another.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/community-part-3-deceitfulness-of-wealth/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/community-part-3-deceitfulness-of-wealth/)



### ***By Deeds, Part 1 of The Destructiveness of All or Nothing***

It's for us to discern whether what we think is wisdom has produced deeds that are life-giving or death dealing.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/deeds-destructiveness-nothing-part-1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/deeds-destructiveness-nothing-part-1/)

### ***The Bible, Part 2 of The Destructiveness of All or Nothing***

The more one reads the Bible, the more one encounters passages in the scriptures that are life-giving and passages that are death-dealing.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/bible-destructiveness-nothing-part-2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/bible-destructiveness-nothing-part-2/)

### ***Nuance, Part 3 of The Destructiveness of All or Nothing***

By ignoring nuance they are setting themselves up to always be destined to exhibit "deeds" that mix life-giving and death-dealing practices.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/nuance-destructiveness-nothing-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/07/nuance-destructiveness-nothing-part3/)

## Priority of hidden treasure or a pearl of great price

The next parable characterizes Jesus’ kingdom not as a weed or a corrupting influence but as treasure: a pearl worth a person selling everything they have to obtain it. This language aims squarely at Jesus’ wealthy listeners who had much to lose by embracing Jesus’ vision for human community. Yes, the changes would cost their bottom line, but what they would get in return would be worth so much more. It would result in a world that would be safer, more compassionate, and more just for everyone including themselves. Notice how this language is repeatedly focused toward the wealthy in the Jesus story:

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Mark 10:21)

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. (Luke 12:33)

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Luke 18:22)

In the parables of the treasure located in the field and the pearl of great price, those who discovered it sold everything they had to obtain it. And in the book of Acts, wealthy Jesus followers did the same to create the kind of community Jesus’ teachings inspired them toward:

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (Acts 2:45)

That there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time

those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:34-35)

## A Net

Also in this week’s reading, we bump into a theme repeated in Matthew’s gospel. A wide net gathers all. Some people are labeled as good and some as wicked, and a sorting takes place at the end of the age. That “end” includes a purging or burning metaphor for the wicked. Given how long this week’s discussion is, I want to re-share last week’s critique of that way of viewing the world at [renewedheartministries.com/Esights/07-21-2023](http://renewedheartministries.com/Esights/07-21-2023).

## Things Old and New

In Jesus’ time, teachers of the Torah who embraced Jesus’ kingdom paradigm would rightly be expected to bring out both old, universal truths and new ones. This reminds me today that it’s okay for Jesus followers, even within traditional expressions of Christianity, to present interpretations and teachings that mix old and new.

When we discover we have been wrong, that’s okay. That’s a good thing. We can make old, death-dealing interpretations give way to new, life-giving interpretations. We can hold on to old, life-giving interpretations too, and adopt new interpretations that we think are more life-giving as new information is discovered. When what we thought was life-giving turns out not to be, we can hold on to the good old, letting go of the bad old, and replace it with the new. The object is not to protect everything that is old, but to ask whether what we are believing and practicing is truly life giving for all. If we hold to this standard, it will produce a Jesus follower that isn’t afraid of the new.

Our goal is to be a source of healing and life and change for the better for everyone. And in this way, Jesus followers can, as our reading states, brings out of our storerooms new treasures as well as old.

## HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week’s eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. How do these parables inform your own justice work? Share that 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.

I want to say a special thank you to all of our supporters out there. And if you would like to join them in supporting Renewed Heart Ministries work you can do so by going to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and clicking **donate**.

You can find Renewed Heart Ministries on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. If you haven’t done so already, please follow us on your chosen social media platforms for our daily posts. Also, if you enjoy listening to the *Jesus for Everyone* podcast, please like and subscribe to the JFE podcast through the podcast platform you use and consider taking some time to give us a review. This helps others find our podcast as well.

Also I want to share that we are partnering in a new weekly YouTube show called “Just Talking.” Each week, Todd Leonard and I will be talking about the gospel lectionary reading for the upcoming weekend. We’ll be talking about each reading in the context of love, inclusion, and societal justice. Our hope is that our talking will be just talking (as in justice) and that during our brief conversations each week you’ll be inspired to also do more than just talking.

If you teach from the lectionary each week, or if you’re just looking for some thoughts on the Jesus story from a more progressive perspective within the context of social justice, check it out, you might like it. You can find *Just Talking* each week on YouTube at [youtube.com/@herbandtoddjusttalking](http://youtube.com/@herbandtoddjusttalking). Please Like, Subscribe, hit the Notification button, and leave us a comment.

And if you'd like to reach us here at Renewed Heart Ministries through email, you can reach us at [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com)

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

I love each of you dearly. ■

(Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™)



The work of helping people find life-giving ways to live out their faith through love, compassion, and justice are needed now more than ever. At Renewed Heart Ministries, we provide resources of faith and healing with the aim of renewing hope and inspiring action as we allow the Jesus story to inform each of us as we work together to shape our world into a compassionate, just and safe home for everyone.

Renewed Heart Ministries is a 501(c)3, grassroots ministry on the margins that prioritizes the needs of marginalized communities, especially those who have been the recipients of misinformed, faith-based harm. Your support enables us to be a life-giving, healing light in our faith communities and continue to be a voice for desperately needed change.

***You get to decide what shape our faith communities take and what voices get to be heard.***

You can support Renewed Heart Ministries with a one-time gift or by becoming one of our monthly contributors. Your donation can be made online at: [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) or by mail at:

Renewed Heart Ministries  
PO Box 1211  
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Please make sure you are receiving all of RHM's free resources by going to our website and clicking "sign up."

And **THANK YOU** for reading, listening to, sharing and supporting RHM's work. Thank you for the decisions you make every day to make our world a safer, compassionate, just home for everyone. Thank you for your dedication to engaging our world and the care you demonstrate, and for being such an important part of our community.

**2023 Projected Budget  
Goal: \$150,000.00**

**Donations Received  
Thru June 2023:  
\$32,320.05**

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

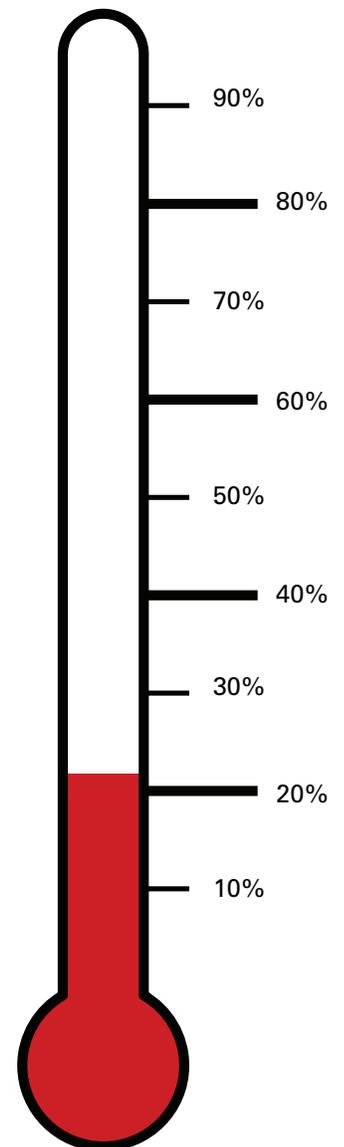


## **Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!**

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.

Each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7pm Pacific/ 10pm Eastern.

To receive the link for the Zoom meeting, email us at [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com).



**Together, we *are* making a difference.**



## Upcoming Events

**AUGUST 13, 2023**

**Edgewood**

**Presbyterian Church**

Lewisburg, WV 24901

**For More Information:**

304.520.0030

**AUGUST 26, 2023**

**Good News Fellowship**

Toronto, Ontario Canada

**For More Information:**

304.520.0030

“Is Christianity compatible with Indigenous values? I would say, well, it depends what history you read on what day. I’m not sure that Christianity is compatible with Indigenous values, but I’m pretty certain that following Jesus seems to be. If you’re more interested in following Jesus than following Christianity, I don’t think there’s a conflict . . . Christianity married empire . . . and has never been able to separate itself from empire since. So it doesn’t mean that Christians can’t follow Jesus but I say it this way: you can be a Christian and follow Jesus, but it’s very difficult.”

Randy S. Woodley

Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview:  
A Decolonized Approach to Christian Doctrine, p. 44

[renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com)



## Are you receiving all of RHM’s free resources each week?

You can find Renewed Heart Ministries on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram for our daily posts. Our *JFE* podcast can be subscribed to through the podcast platform you use. And you can even get messages from RHM delivered to your email inbox every day. (Or weekly if you prefer.)

**Sign up today so you don’t miss a thing!**

Go to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and click “Sign Up!”

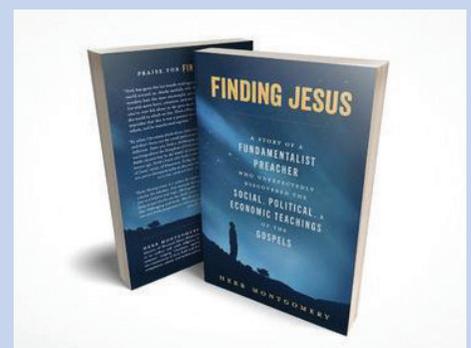
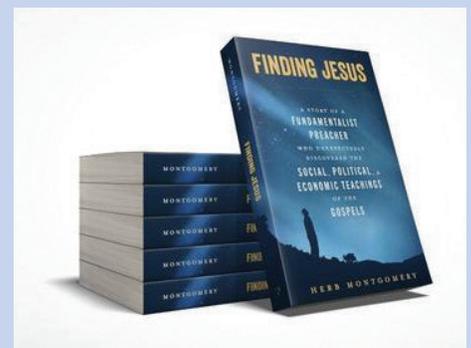
## Finding Jesus is Here!

It’s here! Herb’s new book, *Finding Jesus: A story of a Fundamentalist preacher who unexpectedly discovered the social, political, and economic teachings of the Gospels*, is now available at [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com)!

Here is what one reader wrote: **“Your book is everything that I have been looking for! I need four more copies to share. I have some people I really need to give this to. I want them to read it, too!”**

Pages: 210; Price: \$14.95 (USD)

**Available now at [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com)!**



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.