

AMERICAN UNION NEWSLETTER

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

REFORM MOVEMENT

International Missionary Society

Volume 20, No. 1

January 2004

BAGGAGE FROM THE PAST

(A NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE)

Elder Gary Foster, President

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." *Philippians 3:14-15*

For the past few years God has more and more convinced me that the reason we Christians have such a struggle in our lives is because of the baggage we tote around with us.

This suitcase is full of things that occurred in the past. We never open this case unless we just have to. We never really sit down and meditate on what is even there.

During the years we continue to push more stuff into it. In order to get it closed we have to sit on it. We have to have others come in and help us close the bag. Sometimes when it is least expected the suitcase cracks or pops open, spilling out all the negative emotions and causing havoc, not only in our own life, but also in the lives of others who are a part of our circle of associates.

One lady had a terrible fear of elevators. She would walk up 20 flights of stairs rather than take the elevator. She had turned down many jobs because of this fear. It affected her family because many stores could not be visited due to the elevator. Just the thought of getting into an elevator would cause her to have a panic attack. When she finally was willing to pursue the source of her fear, after 30 years, she discovered the cause: on two different occasions when she was a child her older brother had locked her in a closet. After screaming and begging, she was let out. But this affected her from that day forward. Even though her brother and she were now adults and he had apologized to her for his thoughtlessness, this fear affected her life almost every day. Only when she decided to face the fear, with God's help, and hear His voice for healing, was she released from this baggage.

Another person, a man, is a workaholic. He grew up extremely poor. Many of the things other children enjoyed he never had. At times even food was scarce in his house. Frequently he was teased and embarrassed by his peers because of the shabbiness of his clothes. He pretended that this didn't matter, but it hurt so very much. He vowed, therefore, that if he ever had children of his own, they'd never go through the embarrassment he had. He would work day and night, if necessary, to give them everything they needed.

He kept his promise. Today he owns his own business and is independently wealthy. His family enjoys a high standard of living. However, in the midst of all the prosperity, his marriage is dying. He continues to spend most of his time working at his company in order to obtain more financial security. Yet he can never take a day off from work without feelings of guilt. He complains to his wife about how his not being at work can cause a reduction in their income. A week's vacation or just a day off to be with his family makes him so miserable that the wife and children would just as soon see him at work.

His wife feels that she should have married someone who loves her. His two children feel neglected because Dad rarely spends time with them. He can't understand why his wife and children feel the way they do. After all, he works day and night, but his family does not understand or appreciate him for what he does to make sure they have plenty of money for things they need and want. To him his family is ungrateful. This man is not even aware of the fact that the poverty of his past is baggage that is affecting his own family relationships in a negative way. What is most sad is that he is not willing to face his past and allow Jesus to bring truth into his life.

The poverty of the man's family also has affected his two sisters. The older one was so determined to prove her self-worth by climbing the corporate ladder that she destroyed her health and her marriage and receives in-patient psychiatric treatment most of the year. The younger one hoards everything she can get her hands on, thinking that one day she will need it. Meanwhile her family lives in a house of clutter.

We are often unaware of the baggage that we carry, how it affects not just our own life, but the lives of all those around us, plus how deeply we can be influenced by the baggage of the past. The baggage comes to us in many colors and shapes. It springs from a thousand different causes, and how it affects us in every conceivable way. Some bags are mild and inconsequential; others are deep and destructive, casting a negative influence upon our lives from top to bottom.

It is not easy to get rid of this baggage of the past. Feelings which have been a part of us for 30, 40, or 50 years don't yield quickly or easily to intellectual arguments. Before any corrective action can be taken, we must first recognize that negative influences from our past really do exist. This isn't as easy to do as it may seem. Why? Because the person whose emotions and thoughts have been deeply colored by the anxieties of his past has a difficult time distinguishing what is normal from that which is not. Compulsion to work seems completely normal to the person who is a workaholic.

You may be a perfectionist, imposing excessive and unrealistic demands upon yourself and others because, as a child, you could never meet the expectations of your parents or teachers. Maybe you have a hard time saying, "I love you," to your spouse or children because affection was never openly expressed in your home. Maybe your life is filled with jealousy, suspicion, mistrust, bitterness, hate, self-pity; maybe you're proud and haughty; maybe you have a sour or sullen personality; maybe you're plagued with an inferiority complex or low self-esteem—all of these things have their roots in the anxieties of our past. The question is not whether we have been affected by our past; of course, we have. The question is, how deeply have we been affected and how can we go about restoring balance or wholeness to our lives? Unfortunately, many do not want to be delivered from the baggage of the past. They would rather talk about their problem and use it as a crutch so they can walk with a limp, receive sympathy from others, and draw attention to themselves. They would rather go through life hating others for the pain they have caused, and feeling sorry for themselves, than extend forgiveness to those who hurt them and receive healing for themselves.

As we begin a new year, 2004, may we be willing to go through our suitcase of life and take only the things that are positive and good. Check only your suitcase, not someone else's. Write down the baggage you discover and pray for God to lead you into the path of complete wholeness with Him. As we move into this New Year, may we allow our Lord and Savior, Jesus, to illuminate the baggage that is preventing us from being totally whole in Christ. May we all allow God to bring healing into our lives so that we may be whole in Him. Only Jesus can give us the power to begin making the changes.

Christ only is the great deliverer. "If the Son shall make you free," Christ said, "ye shall be free indeed." the changes that Christ can make in a person's life, to purge the negative from the past, are absolutely astounding.

NEW E-MAIL ADDRESS

The new E-mail address for the *Newsletter* is:

jennings61@sbcglobal.net

* * * * *

ATTENTION FIELD CONFERENCE SECRETARIES

This is the year we will be having field conferences. Please notify us at the "*Newsletter*" (address below) as soon as possible, giving the dates and locations of your conferences, thus enabling all believers to have ample time to prepare their vacations so they can attend. This information will then be repeated monthly in the "*Newsletter*."

+ + + +

Our official title should be:

"American Union Newsletter"

NORTHWEST AND SOUTHWEST FIELD CONFERENCE

July 1 - 4, 2004

Camp Alta, Alta

(near Sacramento, CA)

Campground arrangements have begun. Plan now to attend the conference from beginning to end.

Bring your family, invite your friends, pray that everyone who comes will go away with a closer walk with Christ.

—Elder Henry Holmstroem
NWF President

Jesus said to go and be "fishers of men." He didn't say "catch" men. We do the fishing and God does the catching.

BLESSED NEW YEAR!

PRAYER CLOSET

Sr. Gretchen Schendel of the Sacramento Church needs your prayers. She has breast cancer and has already had a mastectomy. Please pray for her complete recovery.

Coming next month:

What God hath done--a report of God's work for Small Cloud Christian School in Wilton, CA.

"Another year now opens its fair unwritten pages before you. The recording angel stands ready to write. Your course of action will determine what shall be traced by him. You may make your future life good or evil, and this will determine for you whether the year upon which you have just entered will be to you a happy new year." *My Life Today*, p. 5

The *American Union Newsletter* is published for members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Reform Movement, American Union.

This publication is complimentary and carries items of interest submitted by members of the church. We reserve the right to make changes as necessary.

To submit news, write to *American Union Newsletter*, c/o Ruth Jennings, 6509 Sutter Avenue, Carmichael, CA 95608-2726

Phone/Fax: Ruth Jennings, (916) 944-1850: E-mail: jennings61@sbcglobal.net

The original Seventh-day Adventist Movement for Reform of 1914, built upon the firm foundation of the Adventist Movement of 1844