


Pilgrims Progress



By Jan Murray

When I was a little girl, I lived near Tokyo, Japan. Trains were excellent modes of transportation anywhere. The Japanese prided themselves on the punctuality of their trains and nothing stood in the way of the snap of the train doors closing as it rushed off to the next destination.

As a small child, anxious about crossing unknown spaces, two things were very frightening. Train doors didn't seem to close and open like elevator doors do in the United States. Once they closed, that was it, or so it appeared to me. The other scary thing was the yawning gap between the door and open space down to the tracks. I hated heights. It always took courage for me to jump across that Grand Canyon.

I learned the hard way that if you hesitated at that gap and time was up, you might become separated from your family. Yet I always jumped because I knew that I was headed for Ueno Zoo, or my grandmother's house, or all the places we could go in Tokyo.

What fun we would have at those places! My heart pounded each time I crossed FROM leaving the depot curb TO boarding the train for any destination, but I always did it, anticipating our final, fun destination, rather than concentrating on my fear.

Americans are a nation of travelers. We think nothing of jumping into some vehicle and traveling to work, or to relatives during holidays, or to vacation. It is such a common occurrence that we tend to forget that we need to do the same thing in our spiritual lives as well as our natural ones.

God has purposeful, good destinations, or whistle stops, for us all through our lives. He never means for them to be anything but temporary. Unless we are willing to leave FROM where we currently reside in our spiritual lives, we can never get TO the next place God has in mind for us.

Sometimes the journey TO a destination may be hard, but the initial step FROM the depot platform is easy to take. Sometimes that beginning step FROM where we spiritually dwell is a yawning gap that requires determination and courage.

The Bible addresses the need for courage and faith TO and FROM destinations. In Mark 2:1-12, there is a story of a man who was incapable of traveling on his own. The trip FROM the depot was impossible because he was paralyzed. However, nothing is impossible with God. The paralyzed man was blessed with at least four friends for whom the trip FROM the depot was easy.

They had heard of Jesus who healed, and they determined to get their friend to the Master. They didn't let the obvious difficulties FROM the man's home TO the Source of healing stop them. Carrying the man FROM his home to the place where Jesus taught may not have been so difficult. Once there, they faced a big obstacle. Travel TO Jesus was arduous.

Climbing up to the roof with their friend and cutting through the thatch, required persistence and focused purpose. They never gave up! They must have sighed in relief when they finally lowered their friend to Jesus. I'm sure the paralyzed man did too! Jesus healed the paralyzed man, commending the friends on their faith. It was the friends' faith and courage that helped the paralyzed man FROM the depot and TO his healing.

The paralyzed man received forgiveness and healing, therefore traveling spiritually to newness in Christ. The friends' faith also carried them to a new whistle stop in Christ. They grew in their faith to another level of faith.

The paralyzed man may have wanted to leave his current place, but the obstacle FROM was a Grand Canyon gap without help. God bless his friends! Their faith allowed them to move mountains, or at least roofs.

In our Christian walk, we experience FROM and TO pilgrimage difficulties. We can get too comfortable spiritually, making it hard to be willing to leave the depot. Leaving requires courage and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Only when we are willing to leave FROM somewhere, can we begin to travel TO the next destination. Obstacles like divorce, addictions, financial debt, abusive relationships, fear of the unknown, and the busyness of life can shrivel our desire to leave the train station, let alone get back on the tracks again.

Jesus is our Sovereign Lord, not just our Savior. He loves us very much and continually woos His precious ones closer to Him. He promises abundant life and wants to make our relationships with Him richer, deeper, and more able to withstand Satan's onslaught.

He wants to be glorified in our lives so we can be Light to others, drawing them into His Kingdom. Our desire to travel or not to travel does not change that fact.

He understands our reluctance, saying "Fear not for I am with you; do not look around you in terror and be dismayed" (Is. 41:10), "Peace I give you" (John 14:27), "Follow Me!" (John 1:43) "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you" (Jer. 31:3) just so we can draw on the courage His Spirit gives us to continue our trip.

Too many people breathe sighs of relief when they become Christians, and then draw up recliners at the train depot. No! They're at the right spot, but have the wrong idea. It is a train depot, not a home with a doily on the LazyBoy!

Life in Christ is an exciting adventure! Abundant Life doesn't stay at one whistle stop. 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 tells us that Christ freed us FROM our recliners to move TO better places.

That movement transforms us from one level of His glory to another. We need to shine and shine ever brighter. It requires more and more transformation in our lives and is only possible as we draw closer to Him.

I'm praying that you will not be content in your current spiritual zone and will want more Abundant Life in Him. Ask Him to become your Lord, if you have not done so. When you ask Him to show you where you need to go FROM, I promise you, He will do that for you.

Leap off that platform and get on the train! If you have never made Jesus your Savior, it is very simple. Begin by talking to Him as if He were sitting right in front of you. Tell Him you know you are a sinner and have done bad things, and that you need a Savior. Everyone has done bad things (Romans 3:23). No one is exempt.

Tell him that you know you can't get to God because of those bad things, but that God provided a way by sending His only Son to die for your sins. (Romans 6:23) It's a free gift of God. All you have to do is accept it.

Turn away from your sin and believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sin, and rose again from the dead. (Romans 10:9-10) Ask Him to come into your heart and save you. Then say "Thank you for saving me!"

When you ask Him in, you become "born again" and a new person because of Christ. Tell someone who also believes in God that good news! It's important to get hooked up with a Bible preaching church.

While on earth, we travel spiritual and natural tracks. We travel on both because we have natural dirt suits that get dirty, tired, and hungry, yet we have spiritual tracks that know no limits and no impossibilities.

Have you ever looked down railroad tracks in the distance and noticed how they seem to converge in one point? The spiritual and the natural converge in Jesus, and He changes everything. We need to keep using our spiritual eyes, traveling to new whistle stops.

We will see God open doors that in the natural are impossible. Through faith, we can make natural tracks converge and give way to spiritual ones, changing the natural. Just as when we became Christians, the spiritual man changes the natural man.

Journeying with spiritual eyes helps us move FROM one level of His Strength TO another, FROM one level of Faith TO another, FROM one level of His Glory TO another. "He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and sets me upon my high places." (Ps. 18:33) He makes a great traveling companion. A good way to start is to read more of God's Word. Spend more time talking with Him. Obey Him when you hear Him. These aren't new concepts, but they require concentrated purpose, rather like cutting a hole in a thatch roof. Imitate the paralytic's friends, and don't let anything stand in the way of getting closer to Jesus. Tell Him so. Don't get stuck in the rut of a busy life or fear. God continually has plans and purposes for you that are good and therefore exciting and fun, my fellow pilgrim.

Dedicated with love to Dr. Ira Wildsmith, mentor and friend par excellence.

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