

## Two Routes to the City in Great Need An Allegory on Church/Missionary Partnership

by *Ellen Livingood*

Once upon a time there were two brothers who learned about a far away City in Great Need. They were saddened to hear of the plight of the people of this great metropolis, and both brothers determined that they would do whatever they could to rescue the people who lived in this great urban center.

Harvey, the first brother, knew the hardships were very real and urgent, and he wanted desperately to help quickly in any way he could. Fortunately, he had just bought a nice, new automobile, very capable of the journey. Loading up his wife and kids, Harvey quickly took off for the City in Great Need. Although the car was roomy enough for short trips, the family had to pack very carefully for their long journey and could take only the absolute necessities. Family and friends offered lots of other trunks and duffels, but only the minimum fit into the car. Wasting no time, Harvey and his family waved goodbye and headed for the freeway.

Meanwhile, Hank, the second brother, poured over the reports from the City in Great Need for a very long time. He pictured the entire vast city and ached for all of their pain. He and Harvey could only make a tiny dent. "How can thousands and thousands of people in the City of Great Need be helped?" he kept wondering.

"I know! I will organize a caravan of cars. That will do it! I will get everyone I know to buy a car, load up the family, and head for the City in Great Need!" Hank soon was talking to everyone who would listen, encouraging them to invest in a road-worthy automobile and leave as soon as possible on the wonderful mission.

Meanwhile, Harvey and his family were making speedy progress toward the City in Great Need—that is until they ran low on gas. Harvey was not worried as he knew there were many gas stations along the road. Some of them were franchises of the familiar company he patronized back home.

Harvey confidently pulled into the first station he found. There were many people milling around the premises. A few were pumping gas into other cars. A large group was gathered around the tanker truck refilling the underground reservoirs. Glancing through the windows of the station's service

building, Harvey could see a big crowd drinking cokes and enjoying snacks.

When it was his turn, Harvey pulled up to the pumps. He waited several minutes, but no one came to fill his tank. Everyone seemed very busy doing other things. Harvey decided he would pump his own gas, but no matter how many buttons he pushed, nothing came out. He felt a tap on his shoulder and a kindly looking gentleman asked him his destination. Harvey explained that he was on a long journey to the City in Great Need.

The man seemed touched. "We have limited gas for long-distance drivers," he explained. "But I will give you a couple of gallons." He pumped the gas, wished Harvey much God-speed, and moved on to other cars.

Harvey couldn't believe what had just happened, but he was sure things would be better up the road. Indeed they were—at some stations. On occasion, he was readily given a full tank of premium fuel. More often, Harvey and his family were waved off entirely or given only a small can of gas.

Instead of speeding toward the City in Great Need, Harvey discovered he was taking many detours just looking for gas. In fact, the need for fuel was so consuming that he couldn't focus very well on the City in Great Need, and twice he almost lost his way. The trip was taking Harvey and his family far longer than anticipated, and they were distressed to pass so many cars stranded along the interstate. Yet they pressed on.



Back at home, Hank was encountering his own problems. Despite his great enthusiasm and tireless efforts, his caravan idea was meeting little success. Many people didn't own a car and couldn't afford one. Others didn't think they could find the City in Great Need. Some just couldn't believe the people there needed help. Hank was becoming discouraged.

One day Hank sat down with the town mayor and over coffee discussed the whole dilemma. The mayor agreed that

there were lots of people in town who could help those in the City in Great Need, but he wasn't at all sure how many could be convinced to attempt such a long drive. Nor was he certain they should tackle it. Without a solution, the men left the café and headed for their cars parked across the railroad tracks. Just as they reached the crossing, the gate dropped, and a huge locomotive blew past them with a deafening roar. Behind the engine came a long line of passenger cars. Glancing in the windows, the men could see businesspeople in suits, families no doubt on holiday, grandparents headed to visit far-away children, and students returning to school. Obviously all kinds of people rode the train!

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*There were lots of people in town who could help those in the city of great need.*

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Hank was surprised to see that this train was also pulling freight cars. There were dozens and dozens of box cars, tankers, flatcars, stockcars, refrigerated cars, gondolas, hoppers, and autoracks. While the train was not going at a tremendous rate of speed, Hank was awed at its power and momentum.

Just then the train began to slow, and the men realized that it was stopping at the town station, just barely visible down the tracks from where they stood. As they watched, dozens of people climbed up the steps and into the passenger cars. Then the huge train started up again. At first it moved very, very slowly, but soon it picked up speed and disappeared off into the distance. The gates opened, and the men could see their cars in the parking lot beyond.

For a brief moment both of them stared after the train. Then Hank shouted, "That's it! A train! We'll take them on a train!"

"Why didn't we think of that before?" exclaimed the major, his coffee sloshing out of the lid of his paper cup.

"We can get lots and lots of help to the City in Great Need by train!" Hank was waving his arms at the disappearing caboose.

And so was born the great train project. Hank would be the engineer, but first he would need to learn how to drive a locomotive. He began studying manuals and riding with other engineers. It was a whole new world.

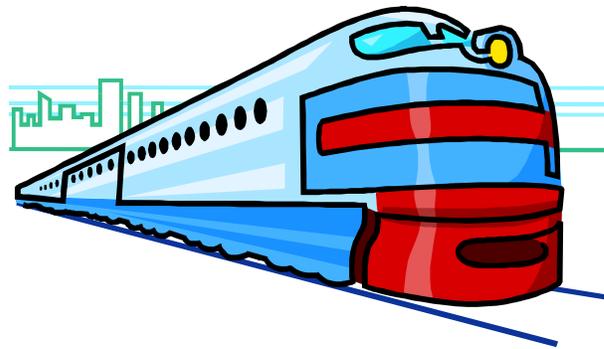
Hank and the mayor recruited city council to back the project. They were pleased to discover how many townspeople were quite interested in riding the train to the City in Great Need. Older folks, teenagers, families, singles, blue collar workers, and professionals—so many were willing to go, especially when they found out their friends were going too.

Running a train was quite a bit more complicated than Hank had first imagined. As he studied engineering, he also discovered he needed to recruit conductors, station agents, dispatchers, and signalmen. Each job required different skills, and yet everyone would have to be committed to getting the train to the City in Great Need.

Hank hadn't forgotten that the train could also carry freight. He began to talk to farmers about donating a hopper of grain, to factory owners about sending a boxcar of their best products, and to store owners about donating a container load of tools. Some of them had a lot of questions about the route and how the goods would be delivered. Hank gave the best information

he could, but he admitted he didn't have all the answers. Some owners decided they were too busy just supplying their local customers, but he was thrilled at how many did choose to couple a freight car or even several cars onto the end of his growing train.

In light of what he knew about the needs of the City in Great Need, Hank had drawn up a list of specific passengers and



freight he wanted on the train. He was a bit nervous when he discovered that the new station master was encouraging everyone to buy a ticket and the freight conductor was welcoming every boxcar donated by a town merchant. It was becoming a rather motley assortment. Hank also fretted because

the loading process was taking so long.

Finally the day came when the train was ready to pull out of the station. It started so slowly that Hank wondered if it would ever pick up speed. However, everyone was doing his or her job, and soon even the caboose was moving down the track. When Hank leaned out the window of the engine and looked behind him, he couldn't believe his eyes. The passenger cars held an amazing variety of people, and there

was an incredible amount and assortment of freight cars. And now it was all moving down the tracks toward the City in Great Need. He pushed the throttle forward.

The train wasn't yet at capacity, and Hank had other pick-ups to make along the way. Some stops were not far from home, but the last station was very close to the City in Great Need. Hank was a bit concerned about the passengers getting on there. He had heard that they were individuals carrying wonderful gifts for the people of the City in Great Need, and he was eager to welcome them on the train. However, he had also been warned

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that many at this station had no ticket. He was much worried about how he was going to get them on board.

As the train pulled into this station, Hank noticed it was not as modern as many of the other stops along the way. However, the backdrop was soon forgotten because of the crowds of passengers waving and eager to board the train. As Hank leaned out the window of the engine, his worst fears were realized. Only a few passengers at the station were holding a ticket. His stomach churned.

Then a wonderful thing happened that made Hank rub his eyes to make sure what he was seeing. Dozens of passengers already on the train were leaning out the windows handing tickets to those standing on the platform. And many hands were reaching out to assist the new travelers into the cars and to lift their luggage in, too. Everyone was laughing and talking. Even those who spoke a different language were being hugged and given a seat. When the train finally pulled out of the station, no one was left standing on the platform. Everyone was on board.

Just when Hank thought they were almost there, several cars uncoupled and a few passengers demanded the train stop and let them off. Hank felt very tired, but finally, finally he could see the skyline of the City in Great Need. As they rolled past the sign indicating the city limits, his spirits rose.

All across the great metropolis, Hank delivered passengers and unloaded freight. He watched carefully to see which shipment was needed where, and which passengers' names were called at various stations. With amazement he realized that every container was requested in one neighborhood or another. Every passenger's name was on the list at one station or the next in this City in Great Need. No one and nothing was extraneous.

As Hank continued to deliver passengers and freight all around the city, he began to notice a difference. There were no longer beggars in the streets; instead fruit and vegetable stands were opening on every corner. Leaning out the window, Hank could hear from somewhere behind him the pounding of construction workers and in the distance he could see farmers beginning to plow new fields. As Hank sat in his engineer's seat high in the cab, all at once he was overwhelmed by a new sight. All across this City in Great Need, lights were beginning to go on in home after home. Where once there was nothing but darkness, the glow was unmistakably growing stronger.

At the last stop, Hank climbed stiffly out of the cab. People on the platform were welcoming the last passengers getting off the train and helping to uncouple the final freight cars. Suddenly Hank was engulfed in a huge bear hug. He

turned around and found himself face to face with Harvey. The two brothers pounded each other on the back, huge grin spreading across both faces. It had been a long time. They had both come a long way.

Together they gazed out at the City in Great Need and then back at the train. Harvey said simply, "We need more trains. We need a lot more trains."



### Questions for Discussion (or create your own)

- Why do you think we have so few engineers, i.e. why aren't more cross-cultural workers and other believers committed to helping get the broader resources of the church delivered to where they can address the needs of the world?
  - How can you help develop more train engineers, i.e. how could your congregation or agency prepare more people to facilitate churches' investment of people and resources for the world?
  - In what practical ways can car drivers and train engineers help each other, i.e. how could missional people going in the traditional sending model facilitate those developing larger partnerships with churches, and vice versa?
- Besides the engineer, what other types of skilled people are crucial, i.e. what specialized roles must be filled to effectively deliver church resources where they are needed around the globe?
- How can the passengers from the home station distribute tickets to those closer to the city who have insufficient funds to buy their own, i.e. how can Western churches facilitate the partnering of Majority World churches without paternalism?
- What specific steps would you like to take?

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the next.*

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