

## **The Trolley Car**

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*“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God until salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16).*

They never noticed it at first, for as they approached the trolley car, the conductor had called out, “Careful, watch your step!” So they tried to be careful and watch their step.

Then there was the confusion and bustle as everyone tried to find a good seat and decide whom to sit next to and whether to sit by a window or on the aisle. After that, they were talking back and forth and getting acquainted with their fellow passengers, some of whom had been on the trolley car for some time already. And then the conductor came around to collect the fares.

Finally someone noticed. “This trolley car isn’t moving!” Everyone looked out the window and sure enough. The trolley car was sitting still. Nobody was sure exactly how long it had been sitting right there, right where they boarded it. But there were exclamations all around of “See that little café? That’s where I had breakfast before I got onto the trolley car” and “I remember that yellow truck across the street.”

The conductor tried to calm the passengers. “We’ll get there; just be patient. These things take time.”

Mr. Jones called out, “Exactly when are we supposed to arrive at our Destination?”

“Well,” replied the conductor, “no one knows the exact day or hour. Some say we should have been there long before now if there hadn’t been delays. But if you stay with this trolley care, you’ll get there.”

After a while longer, Mr. Bradley jumped to his feet and said, “I think it’s about time we figure out why this trolley car isn’t moving. Let’s have a committee meeting and discuss ways and means for getting it going.”

Everyone was in favour of that, and they elected Mr. Bradley chairman, since it was his idea to have a committee in the first place.

“Mr. Chairman,” said a man near the front, “I think we are still here because the fares are too high. How can we make any progress when the conductor keeps coming around asking for money all the time?”

Mr. Thompson spoke next. “What we really need is to get some more passengers on this car. Look at all the empty seats! If we had passengers to fill the capacity of this trolley car, we’d have much more money.”

Then Mr. Taylor raised his hand. “Quantity is not the problem, with all due respect to Mr. Thompson. We don’t need more quantity, but more quality. I move that we get rid of some of our passengers, keeping only the better class of society. When this trolley car becomes known for its high quality of passengers, we’ll be on our way.”



Everybody secretly thought this was a great idea and knew immediately of several they would like to see put off the trolley car. But everybody voted against it because they weren't sure but that someone might nominate them to be put off. So that idea didn't make it.

Then Mr. Bradley, the chairman, had an idea. "Why don't we redecorate the trolley car?" Everyone agreed immediately, and it looked like progress was being made—until they began to discuss what colour to use. Some of the passengers wanted blue carpeting and upholstery, but the rest wanted red. The arguments were loud and long over that point, and the interior-decorating committee died a slow and angry death.

Well, about then came an idea that almost everybody liked. Mr. Hawthorne suggested that the real problem was with the conductor and that what they needed to get the trolley car moving was to fire him and get a new conductor. For once, everyone was united, and it wasn't long until they had a new conductor. But they didn't like the new conductor any better than the last one (he, too, was always asking for even more money), and the trolley car still didn't move.

Every so often someone would say, "I'm tired of this trolley car never going anywhere. It has never gone anywhere, and it never will. I'm getting off."

When that happened, the conductor and the rest of the passengers would try to encourage the impatient one by reminding him that this was the only true trolley car and that those who stayed with the trolley would surely arrive at their Destination. If that didn't work, they'd get one of the older passengers, who had been on the trolley car for a long time, to tell of past experiences.

Well, all of this went on for much longer than it takes to tell. And then one day, one of the passengers was stretching out of the open window of the trolley car and happened to look up. Above the trolley car were electric cables, and on top of the trolley car was some sort of connecting device. But the trolley car was not connected to the cables.

The passenger came back inside the trolley car window with great excitement. Hey, you people! I think I've discovered something! We're not connected up above; we're not connected to the power. Maybe that's why we're not moving."

But the committee was in a discussion about whether or not it was appropriate for trolley car passengers to wear blue jeans on the trolley car, and they hardly heard him.

"Listen," he continued to shout. We're not connected to the power! No wonder this car doesn't move. Come on; look for yourselves. There is equipment to connect, but it isn't connected."

A few other passengers came over to the windows and joined him in leaning out and looking up. Sure enough, they weren't connected to the power overhead.

This small group began earnestly discussing how they could become connected to the source of power. They began to eagerly read the trolley car manual. They followed the directions carefully. Soon others joined them, and the excitement continued to build.

Some of the other passengers opposed them and called them fanatical. But in spite of this opposition, the time came when the majority of the passengers understood for themselves what the source of power was. Through their efforts, the trolley car was connected with the power and at last began to move.

Then a most amazing thing happened. The passengers who didn't believe in connecting with the source of power were so terrified when the trolley car actually began to move that they began leaping out, right and left, as the car picked up speed. All their ideas about this trolley car being the only trolley car to take were discarded, and they hurried to find another trolley car that wasn't moving so they could continue their committee meetings in peace.

The Trolley Car in this parable can be compared to our Adventist Educational System that advertises heaven as its destination.

Every stakeholder is a passenger on this vehicle. On the journey are presidents, directors, superintendents, pastors, teachers and children.

Looking through the window of time however, progress appears to be frustratingly stagnated. Somehow we seem to be where we boarded, stalled in a quagmire of overwhelming circumstances. The picture of student enrolment, for example, is graphed as a flat line for the last seven years, in spite of increasing membership in our churches.

Every Conference, from Newfoundland to British Columbia, has a story to tell. Old timers reminisce of a time when Adventist Christian Education was a given, enrolment was on the increase and sacrifice to enrol in a Seventh-day Adventist school was very much in evidence.

Conventions, marketing seminars, task force committees, as well as education council committees have been convened in search of solutions. Those have generated reflections, introspections, observations and recommendations for consideration.

Why then has there been such minimal progress of reversing the present trend? Could it be that the church school system is in this stagnated situation because of a misguided obsession to fulfil all of the expectations that are provincially and community generated? As a result, the heavenly mission of the school has been blurred.

Maybe it is time for a paradigm shift in our approach to Adventist Christian Education. It cannot be business as usual. What if we focussed more on the primary mission for which our schools were established? What if we prayerfully paused to examine our mission in light of the admonition that the "work of education and evangelism are one"? Yes, it is time to stop sounding the alarm that the school bus has stalled because of declining enrolment, exorbitant cost, and widespread apathy. Instead Conference Administrators, pastors and educators need to sound the rallying cry of urgency that every child entrusted to our church family is a potential soul for the kingdom. That is our primary and sacred responsibility. With such a conviction and commitment, the church and school in partnership will intentionally move forward empowered by the Holy Spirit. The cultivation of such a culture within our Adventist community would result in a significant growth in enrolment as parents understand the significance of their obligation. With the home, church and school unified in its resolve, our children, the future leaders of our

church, will be prepared in a Christ-centered environment for service in society and eternity.

Are we prepared for the challenge?

By the way, the last time I heard about the trolley car, it was well on its way and very close to its destination. What about us?

Adapted by Vernon Langdon with apologies to Morris Venden, the author of the parable, 'The Trolley Car'

**Resources:**

- Venden, Morris, *Modern Parables*, Pacific Press. 1994.