

## **A Parable**

### **By Whitney Altopp**

There was a young man who wanted to set out on a journey by boat to meet his destination. He had enough provisions for the journey if he took the shortest, most direct route. But the most direct route was known for having challenging circumstances. There were stories of bandits and robbers along the way. There was an area which, on occasion, had high winds. And the weather forecast indicated that the dry heat would make some clear paths more challenging.

If he wanted to take the gentler path, which was longer, he would need to delay his leave time in order to collect all that was needed for the added distance.

He hated the idea of waiting. He was eager to get there. He'd fought challenging situations before. And yet he recognized that he's not the exception. What others had fallen prey to he would as well. He was more humble than others, but no less invincible than others. He wished for ignorance or blind faith so that he could move forward with confidence.

Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom has built her house,  
she has hewn her seven pillars.  
She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,  
she has also set her table.  
She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls  
from the highest places in the town,  
'You that are simple, turn in here!'  
To those without sense she says,  
'Come, eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed.  
Lay aside immaturity, and live,  
and walk in the way of insight.'

There was a woman in town known for her ability to help people prepare for their journey. She had a 100% success rate. Her reputation was known throughout the land. Whether people wanted to go the direct route with the various challenges, or the lengthier route which required greater provision, she was there to help them be ready for success. She took as her inspiration Harriet Tubman. A woman who always had successful journeys and knew what it took, even the making of hard decisions and determined discipline that would enable the successful voyage for all.

The young man wondered if he should seek her counsel. He was afraid of what she might bring to his attention, and if upon his knowing, his faith would falter. And yet he knew that he didn't want to fail; that the injury caused by a lack of preparedness would set his journey back even

further, and he knew he didn't want that. He was afraid of what her counsel would require him to consider. He didn't want his journey to be delayed another day. He was eager to get to his destination.

Even now the consideration of whether or not he should seek her counsel distracted him from his clarity of vision. As he imagined all of the "what about"s she could ask, his own consciousness was plagued by them causing his faith to falter. Her presence and promise seemed to generate his own insecurity and fear.

As he walked the streets to complete his final errands before his journey, deep in thought with this nagging question- should I seek her counsel or not- he happened upon a friend. His friend saw him first, so deep into his own thoughts was his attention.

How are you? the friend inquired. And as if mid-sentence the young man told him all about what he was preparing for and the annoyance of his present question.

After listening intently, the friend asked him with a sense of levity, "My man, what if she confirms your preparedness? What if you hear from her how well you've done and how thoroughly you've prepared? What if you come to realize that you're 90% prepared for 100% success?

What if she gives you a way to navigate your faith when it falters on the journey? What if she points you to the one thing which will make a difference when you face the most certain challenges? If you think of your future self, does that help you appreciate your present self's predicament?"

The young man was annoyed by his friend's questions and the levity with which he asked them, after hearing of the man's internal angst. He remembered that this is why he doesn't discuss anything with anybody.

He also remembered the comfort of his friend back home- the one who doesn't ask any curious and inquisitive questions. He always feels so secure with him, free from all of these thoughts. But his life doesn't allow him to stay there. He must make this voyage as quickly as possible so that he can return to the comfort and bliss of his friend back home.

He shot back out of his annoyance a strong philosophical question- If I'm 90% prepared, doesn't that make me 90% likely to succeed? His friend replied, "You know that's not how it works. The 10% you're missing might be necessary for 50% of the journey or it might be 100% necessary for that one key 10% of the voyage."

He did know this. He knew it deep in his heart, but he'd never thought of it this way. Perhaps this is why he's been surprised time and again that his best efforts haven't gotten him to his desired destination. They've gotten him close, but never all of the way there. Or they've gotten him all the way there, but he's arrived battered and bruised and in need of recovery.

He wondered which way it would go this time.