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SPIRITUAL STABILITY: BUILDING AN UNSINKABLE SHIP

We need sufficient spiritual stability to successfully navigate our mortal lives and return safely to our heavenly home.

In the early 17th century, Sweden's king, Gustav II Adolf, commissioned a warship that would be christened the *Vasa*. The ship represented a substantial outlay of resources, particularly the oak from which the vessel would be built. Gustav Adolf closely oversaw the construction process, attempting to ensure that the *Vasa* would fully realize his expectations.

After construction began, Gustav Adolf ordered the *Vasa* to be made longer. Because the width supports had already been built from precious oak, the king directed the builders to increase the ship's length without increasing its width. Although the shipwrights knew that doing so would compromise the *Vasa's* seaworthiness, they were hesitant to tell the king something they knew he did not want to hear. They complied. Gustav Adolf also insisted that this ship have not simply the customary single deck of guns but cannons on three decks, with the heaviest cannons on the upper deck. Again, against their better judgment, the shipwrights complied.

On August 10, 1628, the *Vasa* began its maiden voyage. After the *Vasa* left the harbor, a strong wind entered its sails, and the ship began to tip. Before long, "she heeled right over and water gushed in through the gun ports until she slowly went to the bottom under sail, pennants and all."¹ The *Vasa's* maiden voyage was about 4,200 feet (1,280 m).

Gustav Adolf's desire for an extravagant status symbol ruined the design of what would have been a magnificent sailing vessel, the mightiest warship of its time. The shipbuilders' reluctance to speak up—their fear of the king's displeasure—deprived the king of their knowledge and insight. All involved lost sight of the goals of the enterprise: to protect Sweden and to promote its interests abroad. A ship that attempts to defy the laws of physics is simply a boat that won't float.

For us to successfully navigate our mortal lives, we need sufficient spiritual stability to confront crosswinds and crosscurrents, make the necessary turns, and return safely to our heavenly home. There are things we can do to increase our spiritual stability. I will touch on four.

Obeying God's Commandments

The first is obeying God's commandments. Just as the *Vasa* was subject to physical laws, we are all subject to spiritual laws. No one is exempt. We need to obey these spiritual laws, which we refer to as God's commandments.

Working with physical laws in the ship's construction might have felt restrictive to Gustav Adolf, but the *Vasa* would not have sunk before its mission started had it complied with these laws. Instead, it would have had the freedom and flexibility to accomplish what it was intended to do.

So, too, obedience to God's laws preserves our freedom, flexibility, and ability to achieve our potential. The commandments are not intended to restrict us. Rather, obedience leads to increased spiritual stability and long-term happiness.

Obedience is our choice. Jesus directed, "Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore keep my commandments" (3 Nephi 15:10). It is that simple. Settle it. Decide now to be exactly obedient. Nothing will increase spiritual stability more. Nothing will give us greater freedom to accomplish our life's mission.

Heeding Counsel and Becoming Lifelong Learners

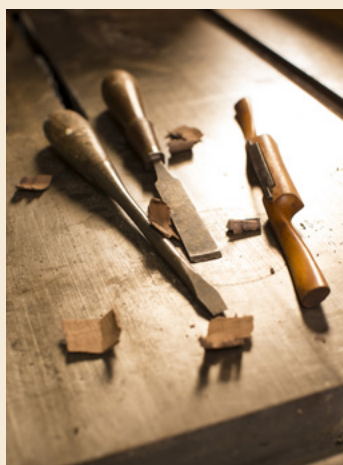
Second, we need to pay attention and give heed to counsel from trusted sources and commit ourselves to becoming lifelong learners.

One of the pitfalls of gaining knowledge is the arrogance that can come when we think we know so much that there is nothing left to learn. We have all seen this in individuals who are too certain of their own brilliance. It is really hard to teach a know-it-all.

Mindful of this, and desirous to be a lifelong learner, President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has said, "I am still a child with lots to learn. Most folks can teach me something."² When he extended the call to me to be a General Authority, President Eyring taught me an important lesson. He said that when he hears someone tell a story that he has heard before or use a scripture that he is very familiar with, he asks himself, "Why is the Lord underlining that for me?" and "What have I yet to learn from that story or scripture?" If we wish to increase our spiritual stability, we will be willing to learn and will be sufficiently humble to accept guidance no matter our age and experience.

It really is our choice. We can listen to and heed counsel given to us by Church leaders, especially those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators; by parents; and by trusted friends—or not. We can seek to be lifelong learners—or not. We can increase our spiritual stability—or not. If we fail to increase our spiritual stability, we will become like the *Vasa*—a boat that won't float.





✦ *Making Jesus Christ Our Foundation*

Fourth, finally, and most important, our spiritual stability increases in proportion to the degree to which we establish Jesus Christ as our foundation.

Without Christ, we are driven like a vessel tossed about upon the waves. We have no power because we have no sail. We have no stability, especially in times of storm, because we have no anchor. We have no direction or purpose because we don't have anything with which to steer. We must make Christ our foundation.

In order to face, overcome, and be prepared for the crosswinds and crosscurrents of life, we must obey God's commandments; become humble, willing, and determined lifelong learners; serve others; and establish Jesus Christ as the foundation of our lives. As we do so we increase our spiritual stability. Unlike the *Vasa*, we will be able to return to safe harbor, having fulfilled our destiny. ■

From a Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 16, 2014. For the full text in English, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. Letter from the Swedish Council of the Realm to King Gustav II Adolf; translation quoted in Richard O. Mason, "The *Vasa* Capsizes," virtual-school.edu/mon/CaseStudies/Vasa/vasa.html. Many accounts of the *Vasa* exist; see, for instance, vasamuseet.se/en for history and other links.
2. Henry B. Eyring, in Robert I. Eaton and Henry J. Eyring, *I Will Lead You Along: The Life of Henry B. Eyring* (2013), 409.

✦ *Serving Others*

Third, being outwardly directed, caring about others, and serving others increases our spiritual stability.

Eternity stays in clearer focus when we focus on others as we seek to help Heavenly Father's children. I have found it much easier to receive inspiration when I am praying to find out how I can help another than when I am simply praying for myself.

We may believe that at some future point we will be in a better situation to help. In reality, now is the time. We are mistaken if we think that it will be more convenient when we have more time, more money, or more anything to serve others. Regardless of circumstances, we have a choice. Will we help others or not? We flunk a significant test of mortality if we do not choose to help those in need. And, if we do help, we increase our own spiritual stability.

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