

Sailing with God

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Psalm 65:5 -- You faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds, O God our savior. You are the hope of everyone on earth, even those who sail on distant seas.

I was pondering over a talk idea when sailing came to me. This is odd because I'm not a sailor: I've never really ever been on a sailing ship that I can remember, and I know nothing about the skills or science of navigation. So why should this idea come into my mind, God?

As I started my research, it became apparent that most of Jesus' ministry took place around the Sea of Galilee. Yes, important events happened in the city of Jerusalem, but he spent the three years of earthly ministry primarily along the shores of this fresh water lake. More than half of his parables were uttered there, as well as most of his miracles being performed.

Capernaum, on the northwestern shore became his 'hometown' throughout his ministry. Mary of Magdala, a town on the western shore, became one of Christ's chief followers. Three of his disciples came from Bethsaida, just two miles from Capernaum.

So, I had never really considered how important the water would be to this time. Jesus was a carpenter, not a sailor or fisherman. But he related to the fishermen as becoming fishers of men. And yes, we know the stories that the Bible shares about Jesus speaking to the people from a boat, and the miracle of calming the sea and walking

on the water. But I never related this to sailing. I never envisioned boats with sails.

And I don't know why not. The first visual depictions of sailing vessels date back to Mesopotamia, 5500 years prior to the time of Christ. In 1985, in the Sea of Galilee when the lake level was particularly low, the remains of a wooden ship was found on the lakebed near Magdala. Radiocarbon dating place the date to be 1st Century, around the time of Christ. It has come to be call the "Jesus Boat" and is believed to be similar to the ones they used in the Biblical references of the day.

It was pretty large: 27 feet long and 8 feet wide. It was not like a rowboat. It was powered by a large sail and would have had plenty of room for seine nets that could have been drawn round into a circle to catch a shoal of fish. John 21:6 reads: *Then he said, "Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!" So they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it.*

These sailing vessels would have been used for gathering food, as well as transporting goods and people from one town to another on the Sea of Galilee. In the day there were 16 manmade harbors where ships could port, which attests to the commercial importance of the lake in the time of Jesus. In contrast, today there are only 5 harbors, used primarily for tour boats.

Sailing was important to the people of the day, as it is today globally. Ships are used commercially as well as recreationally. I know people who have sailing vessels that absolutely love being out

on the water – enjoying the peace, quiet, serenity, and challenge of being away for the daily stresses life can bring.

Sailing can be seen as a metaphor for Life. Both are a journey. When we are born our journey begins, and as in sailing much of how our journey goes is dependent upon the skills we develop, the decisions we make, the preparation we adopt, and the respect and attention we pay to our situation.

As in sailing, we are part of a team, a crew, a family of individuals whose lives are intertwined. We must learn to work together to survive the elements and arrive at our destination. We are all in one great boat, surrounded by an element that can be tame or fierce, a gentle breeze or a brutal tempest. Such is our ego versus our spiritual natures. They will alternately rear their heads.

The keel of a boat provides resistance to sideways movement and provide stability. It also converts the sideways motion of the boat into forward motion. Our prayer life and faith in Christ is our keel; together they provide spiritual stability and keep us moving forward regardless of our environment.

Sailing obviously depends upon the winds, and the sailor learns to manage them. He does not control the winds, but he learns the intricacies of setting the sails. In life we face similar situations. We do not control what Life throws at us, but we can learn to manage whatever comes our way. Here are four steps to consider.

First Step: Some challenges are very, very troubling; some are just annoying. But the trick is not to get caught up in the appearance of

it and succumb to despair by saying “Oh woe is me. The world is coming to an absolute dead stop.” Then we embrace it so closely that we can't see anything else. So, step number one is simply to **Step Back**, and take a dispassionate look at what is really going on. When we put a little distance between ourselves and our challenge we can take a new perspective; see it in a less personal manner.

Many of us tend to get wrapped up in our stuff. We cling to it, make it our best friend, and we don't recognize when it has become our straightjacket. If we meet someone new, we share our problems and our woes with them, and soon they are ensnared. We think about our circumstance constantly and hug it so close it is all we see.

But what I realize is that if I take a little distance, I start to see a little more. And the further, and the further I get away from my problems, I realize ... what a big, wide wonderful world that we live in.... The further that we can get away from our problem, mentally and emotionally, the smaller the problem seems.

I suppose it would be like sailing and suddenly you are in a no wind situation. Instead of worrying and crying, “Oh, woe is me, I have no wind.” Enjoy the quiet; read a book. Bob up and down and fish, or motor back to port and have a nice dinner. Spend the night, enjoy the journey and try again tomorrow.

So, Step #1, Step Back, see our problem with new eyes.

Step #2: Ask for Help. The primary reason sailing ships today have radios is to ask for help when needed. But ask for God's help first. Move into the silence within and ask for God's help. As we become

still, thoughts and guidance will begin to percolate up. A face, a name may come to us. God is guiding us to ask them for help.

Thirty years ago, Steve Jobs said one thing is more powerful than technology. Jobs was notorious for his "my way or the highway" approach, yet he also believed in the leverage provided by harnessing the creativity, problem-solving ability, and intelligence of as many people as possible. He said that asking for help is the one thing that separates people who achieve from those who only dream. Leverage the power of the people around us; they are the help that God is providing. They are the power, love, and inspiration of God flowing toward us. They are part of God's solution for us.

When we ask for God to shed some light and love on our challenges, we are given answers and solutions. Our part is to be expectant, willing, ready, and open to that assistance. It may come from surprising sources.

Step #2 is to ask for God's help.

Step #3. Investigate Alternative Solutions. When we face challenges, God works in the background monitoring our decisions and supplies new guidance for every move that we make. We lose a job, so God whispers new directives into our minds and hearts for positions that make better use of our talents and abilities. If something profoundly bad happens to us, go through the first two steps and know that God is inviting us to investigate other areas.

I believe that for everything that happens to us God is working diligently to arrange it for our highest good, our optimal growth and

benefit. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.” We must investigate; we must pray, trust, have faith, and then go out, climb another stair, examine the possibilities, and take a new direction.

Proverbs 3:5-6 teaches – “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”

Just as sailors master the skills of tacking, how to play the winds and sail even into the wind by moving back and forth, investigating alternative directions and solutions, so can we learn to tack into whatever life throws at us. God always provides the wind-power; we just learn to harness the Power of God.

It is important to keep our minds and hearts centered in Spirit, no matter where we are. Roman Philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who lived during Jesus’ lifetime, wrote: If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.

Step #3 is to investigate alternative directions and solutions, focus on God, and reset the sails.

Step #4. The Final Step is to "Let go, let God". Nothing is gained by clinging to fear, worry, and despair. They are not companions worthy of our time and emotional energy.

Our negative emotions are often tied to our breathing. When we are afraid or nervous, our breathing tends to be shallow and fast. If we control our breathing, we control our emotions.

I tend to faint after being given a shot. Recently, I was given a tetanus shot because of my Shingles and I told the doctor of my propensity, and she said that it was because I would hold my breath during the injection. So, I focused on breathing deeply as she gave me the shot and I had no problem.

When we are worried or under stress, one response of course, is to drink ourselves into oblivion, or seek escape by some other means. But a real solution is to sit and be still. We focus on our breath, and as we inhale say the word 'love'; as we exhale we say the word 'fear', 'dread', 'worry' or whatever negative emotion we are feeling. We make the inhalation long and deep through the nose, if possible. The exhalation is quicker, through the mouth. At the slight pause between exhaling and inhaling we sit quietly and feel the peace.

After ten such breaths, breathe normally, still thinking the word "love" on the inhalation and the negative idea you want to release on the exhalation. The idea at this point is not to force or control our breathing, but just watch it come in and go out.

Letting go, releasing, forgiving, is one of the most powerful things we can do. We let go and refill with love. We release the anger and fill with love. We forgive those who have hurt us and fill with love. Always love.

So, when we come across a challenge, remember these four steps and think of the word SAIL: "S" - Step back; "A" - Ask God's help; "I" - Investigate alternatives through taking action; and "L"- Let Go, let God. SAIL. And if you can remember those four steps, I can see

you sailing with God; smoothly sailing through every obstacle, any challenge, and living your life joyously and filled with love. In the words of William Arthur Ward, “The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.”

God bless you all, and happy sailing.

Let us pray....