

Stay in the Boat

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Let's begin with a parable given by Elder and Sister Renlund:

Elder Dale G. Renlund: Imagine having capsized in a boat while sailing in the ocean. You're wearing a life preserver and have been swimming for hours toward what you believe is the nearest shore, but you can't be sure. You've become extremely dehydrated, so that every time you start swimming, you become light-headed and fatigued. By your best estimates the shore is 30 kilometers, or 18 miles, away. You fear for your life because you can't swim that far. In the distance you hear a small engine. The sound seems to be coming toward you; your hope of rescue soars. As you look, you see a small fishing boat approaching.

Sister Ruth L. Renlund: "Oh, thank heavens," you think, "the captain sees me!" The boat stops and a kindly, weather-beaten fisherman helps you on board. Gratefully you crawl to a seat in the boat, breathing a sigh of relief. The fisherman gives you a canteen of water and some soda crackers. You consume them greedily. The water and soda crackers provide enough nourishment for you to recover. You are so relieved and so happy. You are on your way home.

As you begin to revive and start feeling better, you start paying attention to some things you hadn't really noticed before. The water from the canteen is a bit stale and not what you would have preferred, like Evian or Perrier. The crackers tasted good, but what you really wanted was some delicatessen meat followed by a chocolate croissant. You also notice that the kindly fisherman wears worn boots and blue jeans. The sweatband on his hat is stained, and he seems to be hard of hearing.

Elder Dale G. Renlund: You note that the boat is well-used and that there are dents in the right side of the bow. Some of the paint is chipped and peeling. You see that when the fisherman relaxes his grip on the rudder, the boat pulls to the right. You begin to worry that this boat and this captain cannot provide the rescue you need. You ask the fisherman about the dents and the rudder. He says he

hasn't worried much about those things because he has steered the boat to and from the fishing grounds, over the same route, day in and day out, for decades. The boat has always gotten him safely and reliably where he wanted to go.

You are stunned! How could he not worry about the dents and the steering? And why could the nourishment have not been more to your liking? The more you focus on the boat and the fisherman, the more concerned you become. You question your decision to get on board in the first place. Your anxiety begins to grow. Finally, you demand that the fisherman stop the boat and let you back into the water. Even though you are still more than 20 kilometers, or 12 miles, away from shore, you can't stand the idea of being in the boat. With sadness, the fisherman stops the boat and helps you back into the ocean. You are on your own again.

Sister Ruth L. Renlund: Consider this story as a parable in which the boat represents the Church and the fisherman represents those who serve in the Church. The sole purpose of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to help Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in Their work to bring to pass the eternal life of God's children. It provides the covenant path, the way to return to our Heavenly Father. Those who serve in the Church, though not perfect, are essential to help and encourage us along the covenant path.

What do the boat and the fisherman teach us about the Church? Do dents and peeling paint on the Church change its ability to provide the authorized saving and exalting ordinances to help us become like our Father in Heaven? If the fisherman must hold on to the rudder with both hands to keep the boat on course, does that negate his and the boat's ability to get us safely and reliably where we want to go? You do not have to be an ordained seer, like my husband, to know that slipping back into the water instead of staying in the boat is risky. Yet when we lose sight of the big picture, the small dents and peeling paint can loom large in our minds.

Every member needs his or her own witness of the truthfulness of the restored Church. Without a true conversion, including a mighty change of heart, you may begin to focus on the metaphorical soda crackers and chipped paint.

President Russell M. Nelson in April 2018 general conference said: "You don't have to wonder about what is true [see Moroni 10:5]. You do not have to wonder whom you can safely trust. Through personal revelation, you can receive your own witness that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, that Joseph Smith is a prophet, and that this is the Lord's Church. Regardless of what others may say or do, no one can ever take away a witness borne to your heart and

mind about what is true.” This witness is more crucial now than it has ever been.¹

Okay, do we all have that parable down? Good. I remember watching this devotional online and thought this parable was a bit off the mark. If I’m not mistaken, they are comparing a rickety falling apart old boat to the church? I thought the *one true church* of God was supposed to be perfect. I can understand the captain being not perfect and falling apart. The leaders have their own faults, they aren’t perfect. But the boat should be pristine in condition in my opinion.

I might not be on the same page as the church, I mean that’s a given by now right? But I wasn’t expecting the church to give me perfect food and water that I expected. I just wanted the truth and answers to questions. I think that’s fine to expect from your leaders.

President Nelson said it best:

Whatever questions or problems you have, the answer is always found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Learn more about His Atonement, His love, His mercy, His doctrine, and His restored gospel of healing and progression. Turn to Him! Follow Him!²

Christ is the key. It’s not to be found in a church but a person, Jesus Himself. I might not believe in organized religion anymore, but I have not lost my faith in Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father but by Him.³

The LDS Church claims to be the only true church on the face of the Earth.⁴ If that’s the case, shouldn’t they have all the answers? They speak for Christ right? So they should have all the answers. If that’s the case, why do they dance around the hard questions when they are presented with them? They do not know the answers to hard questions.

¹Elder Dale G. Renlund Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles With Sister Ruth L. Renlund Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults • January 13, 2019 • Brigham Young University–Hawaii

²President Russel M. Nelson, The Answer Is Always Jesus Christ, April 2023 General Conference

³John 14:6

⁴Doctrine & Covenants 1:30