

# Guided Safely Home

By President Thomas S. Monson



We look heavenward for that unfailing sense of direction, that we might chart and follow a wise and proper course.

Brethren, we are assembled as a mighty body of the priesthood, both here in the Conference Center and in locations throughout the world. I am honored yet humbled by the responsibility which is mine to address a few remarks to you. I pray for the Spirit of the Lord to attend me as I do so.

Seventy-five years ago, on February 14, 1939, in Hamburg, Germany, a public holiday was celebrated. Amid fervent speeches, cheering throngs, and the playing of patriotic anthems, the new battleship *Bismarck* was put to sea via the River Elbe. This, the most powerful vessel afloat, was a breathtaking spectacle of armor and machinery. Construction required more than 57,000 blueprints for the 380-millimeter, radar-controlled, double-gun turrets. The vessel featured 28,000 miles (45,000 km) of electrical circuits. It weighed over 35,000 tons, and armor plate provided maximum safety. Majestic in appearance, gigantic in size, awesome in firepower, the mighty colossus was considered unsinkable.

The *Bismarck's* appointment with destiny came more than two years later, when on May 24, 1941, the two most powerful warships in the British Navy, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Hood*, engaged in battle the *Bismarck* and the German cruiser *Prinz Eugen*. Within five minutes the *Bismarck* had sent to the depths of the Atlantic the *Hood* and all but three men of a crew of over 1,400. The other British battleship, the *Prince of Wales*, had suffered heavy damage and turned away.

Over the next three days the *Bismarck* was engaged again and again by British warships and aircraft. In all, the British concentrated the strength of five battleships, two aircraft carriers, 11 cruisers, and 21 destroyers in an effort to find and to sink the mighty *Bismarck*.

During these battles, shell after shell inflicted only superficial damage on the *Bismarck*. Was it unsinkable after all? Then a torpedo scored a lucky hit, which jammed the *Bismarck's* rudder. Repair efforts proved fruitless. With guns primed and the crews at ready, the *Bismarck* could only steer a slow circle. Just beyond reach was the powerful German air force. The *Bismarck* could not reach the safety of home port. Neither could provide the needed haven, for the *Bismarck* had lost the ability to steer a charted course. No rudder, no help, no port. The end drew near. British guns blazed as the German crew scuttled and sank the once seemingly indestructible vessel. The hungry waves of the Atlantic first lapped at the sides and then swallowed the pride of the German navy. The *Bismarck* was no more.<sup>1</sup>

Like the *Bismarck*, each of us is a miracle of engineering. Our creation, however, was not limited by human genius. Man can devise the most complex machines but cannot give them life or bestow upon them the powers of reason and judgment. These are divine gifts, bestowed only by God.

Like the vital rudder of a ship, brethren, we have been provided a way to determine the direction we travel. The lighthouse of the Lord beckons to all as we sail the seas of life. Our purpose is to steer an undeviating course toward our desired goal—even the celestial kingdom of God. A man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder, never likely to reach home port. To us comes the signal: chart your course, set your sail, position your rudder, and proceed.

As with the mighty *Bismarck*, so it is with man. The thrust of the turbines and the power of the propellers are useless without that sense of direction, that harnessing of the energy, that directing of the power provided by the rudder, hidden from view, relatively small in size but absolutely essential in function.

Our Father provided the sun, the moon, and the stars—heavenly galaxies to guide mariners who sail the lanes of the sea. To us, as we walk the pathway of life, He provides a clear map and points the way toward our desired destination. He cautions: beware the detours, the pitfalls, the traps. We cannot be deceived by those who would lead us astray, those clever pied pipers of sin beckoning here or there. Instead, we pause to pray; we listen to that still, small voice which speaks to the depths of our souls the Master’s gentle invitation, “Come, follow me.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet there are those who do not hear, who will not obey, who prefer to walk a path of their own making. Too often they succumb to the temptations which surround all of us and which can appear so enticing.

As bearers of the priesthood, we have been placed on earth in troubled times. We live in a complex world with currents of conflict everywhere to be found. Political schemes ruin the stability of nations, despots grasp for power, and segments of society seem forever downtrodden, deprived of opportunity and left with a feeling of failure. The sophistries of men ring in our ears, and sin surrounds us.

Ours is the responsibility to be worthy of all the glorious blessings our Father in Heaven has in store for us. Wherever we go, our priesthood goes with us. Are we standing in holy places? Please, before you put yourself and your priesthood in jeopardy by venturing into places or participating in activities which are not worthy of you or of that priesthood, pause to consider the consequences.

We who have been ordained to the priesthood of God can make a difference. When we maintain our personal purity and honor our priesthood, we become righteous examples for others to follow. The Apostle Paul admonished, “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”<sup>3</sup> He also wrote that the followers of Christ should be “as lights in the world.”<sup>4</sup> Providing an example of righteousness can help to illuminate an increasingly dark world.

Many of you will remember President N. Eldon Tanner, who served as a counselor to four Presidents of the Church. He provided an undeviating example of righteousness throughout his career in industry, during service in the government in Canada, and as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He gave us this inspired counsel: “Nothing will bring greater joy and success than to live according to the teachings of the gospel. Be an example; be an influence for good.”

He continued: “Every one of us has been foreordained for some work as [God’s] chosen servant on whom he has seen fit to confer the priesthood and power to act in his name. Always remember that people are looking to you for leadership and you are influencing the lives of individuals either for good or for bad, which influence will be felt for generations to come.”<sup>5</sup>

We are strengthened by the truth that the greatest force in the world today is the power of God as it works through man. To sail safely the seas of mortality, we need the guidance of that Eternal Mariner—even the great Jehovah. We

reach out, we reach up to obtain heavenly help.

A well-known example of one who did not reach upward is that of Cain, son of Adam and Eve. Powerful in potential but weak of will, Cain permitted greed, envy, disobedience, and even murder to jam that personal rudder which would have guided him to safety and exaltation. The downward gaze replaced the upward look; Cain fell.

In another time and by a wicked king, a servant of God was tested. Aided by the inspiration of heaven, Daniel interpreted for the king the writing on the wall. Concerning the proffered rewards—even a royal robe, a necklace of gold, and political power—Daniel said, “Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another.”<sup>6</sup> Great riches and power had been offered to Daniel, rewards representing the things of the world and not of God. Daniel resisted and remained faithful.

Later, when Daniel worshipped God despite a decree declaring such to be forbidden, he was thrown into a den of lions. The biblical account tells us that the following morning, “Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in ... God.”<sup>7</sup> In a time of critical need, Daniel’s determination to steer a steady course yielded divine protection and provided a sanctuary of safety. Such protection and safety can be ours as we also steer that steady course toward our eternal home.

The clock of history, like the sands of the hourglass, marks the passage of time. A new cast occupies the stage of life. The problems of our day loom ominously before us. Throughout the history of the world, Satan has worked tirelessly for the destruction of the followers of the Savior. If we succumb to his enticings, we—like the mighty *Bismarck*—will lose that rudder which can guide us to safety. Instead, surrounded by the sophistication of modern living, we look heavenward for that unfailing sense of direction, that we might chart and follow a wise and proper course. Our Heavenly Father will not leave our sincere petition unanswered. As we seek heavenly help, our rudder, unlike that of the *Bismarck*, will not fail.

As we venture forth on our individual voyages, may we sail safely the seas of life. May we have the courage of a Daniel, that we might remain true and faithful despite the sin and temptation which surround us. May our testimonies be as deep and as strong as that of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, who, when confronted by one who sought in every way possible to destroy his faith, declared, “I could not be shaken.”<sup>8</sup>

With the rudder of faith guiding our passage, brethren, we too will find our way safely home—home to God, to dwell with Him eternally. That such may be so for each of us, I pray in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, amen.

1. See Ludovic Kennedy, *Pursuit: The Chase and Sinking of the Bismarck* (1974).

2. Luke 18:22.

3. 1 Timothy 4:12.

4. Philippians 2:15.

5. N. Eldon Tanner, "For They Loved the Praise of Men More Than the Praise of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 74.

6. Daniel 5:17.

7. Daniel 6:23.

8. Jacob 7:5.