

THE SEAFARER'S MIND

The Seafarer's Mind is a wonderful resource for seafarers. The book is rich in narrative and case studies and covers a wide range of issues and challenges facing sailors on the high seas. A hard hitting account which unpacks the realities of a modern version of indentured labour, the author provides hope in the often harsh world of seafaring. This is a practical guide to living in isolating and confined situations where temptations abound and moral compasses are often abandoned.

Martin Otto is the world's leader in serving seafarers through his international mission work. He is to be commended for being God's advocate in such an insightful, humble and practical manner. This book will become a widely read text and is sure to become a key reference for all seafarers seeking to live a Godly life in an often harsh and unforgiving environment. I recommend it wholeheartedly.

Professor Ross Dowling AM
Global Cruise Ship Lecturer
Perth, Australia



Rev. Martin Otto and his wife Monika have been serving seafarers in the port of Hamburg for the last 32 years. They work with the international seamen's mission, Seamen's Christian Friend Society based in the UK. Martin has visited more than 20,000 ships (cargo ships, cruise ships, navy ships and yachts) and shares in this

book out of his wealth of experience, about the seafarer's mind.

Martin is the author of four other books – Seafarers a strategic missionary vision; Church on the Oceans; Faith at Sea; and Help, how can I overcome temptation? He also is the director of training for the Seamen's Christian Friend Society and the Church on the Oceans project in the Philippines.



Seamen's Christian Friend Society Edition 7

ISBN 978-3-944472-23-2



9 783944 472232



THE SEAFARER'S MIND

MARTIN OTTO

THE SEAFARER'S MIND

The Questions I've Always
Wanted to Ask

MARTIN OTTO

Seamen's Christian Friend Society Edition 7

Martin Otto

The Seafarer's Mind

Seamen's Christian Friend Society Edition

Vol. 7

- Vol. 1 Volker Lamaack. The Prison at Sea (English, German, Taglish)
Vol. 2 Martin Otto. Seafarers – a strategic missionary vision (English, German, Spanish, Tagalog)
Vol. 3 Martin Otto. HELP! How Can I Overcome Temptation? (Englisch, Taglish)
Vol. 4 Martin Otto. Faith at Sea (English, Taglish)
Vol. 5 Martin Otto. Church on the Oceans (English, Tagalog)
Vol. 6 Volker Lamaack. The only Bridge – A basic Bible Course for Group Work (German, English, Tagalog)
Vol. 7 Martin Otto. The Seafarer's Mind (English)



Seamen's Christian Friend Society
www.scfs.org

Martin Otto

The Seafarer's Mind

RVB

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

Copyright © 2020 by Martin Otto
M.Otto@allianzmission.de

Reformatorischer Verlag Beese
Friedensallee 76, D-22765 Hamburg
info@rvbeese.de

ISBN 978-3-944472-23-2

Printed in Germany

Cover:
HCB Verlagsservice Beese, Friedensallee 76, 22765 Hamburg
www.rvbeese.de / info@rvbeese.de

Layout: Titus Vogt

Production:
CPI / Clausen & Bosse GmbH, 25917 Leck
www.cpi-print.de / info@cpi-print.de

Contents

Introduction.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	11
Endorsements	13
Foreword	19
1. I'm finally a seaman!	23
2. What is home? Where is home?	29
3. This loneliness is driving me crazy.....	35
4. Am I stuck in a trap?	41
5. Seafarers fears and worries.....	47
6. What is the goal or purpose of my life?	51
7. Will there ever be an end to the temptations?	55
8. How can I be a good husband? How can I take care of my family?	69
9. What kind of legacy can I leave for my children?	73
10. Will I ever have enough time for my children?	77
11. What do my children think about me?	85
12. What is necessary to be a good father?	91
13. Which religion is the right one?	99
14. Where can I find solutions?	103
15. People who have found the answer	107
Appendix 1	117
Appendix 2	123

Introduction

During many of my conversations with seafarers, on countless ships, it has become clear that certain problems are common to the seafaring life. Undoubtedly the primary “problem” is the need, the financial circumstances, which drive so many people in so many countries to enter into this way of life in order to support their family.

Let us take for example the young Filipino in his densely populated city who has listened into the conversations of seafaring friends and relatives and has decided, perhaps from his early years to follow their example and ‘go to sea’. He is aware of the need to develop his English language skills and has tried to do so at school, but this proves to be quite hard in daily social life where he is most probably continually required to respond in Tagalog, Cebuano or a local dialect. He is also much blessed if his family has been able to afford to keep him at school through all his grades, and he needs these basic literacy and numeracy skills to qualify him for a foothold on the examinations ladder leading to a basic registration as a seaman. Perhaps he is blessed by a seafaring relative helping him through the financial barriers of primary education to climb the wall of secondary education in preparation for the ‘hurdles’ of a tertiary marine college education.

In the Philippines alone one can find several maritime schools, which offer a Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation, a Bachelor of Science in Marine Engineering, and even a basic seaman’s course. After receiving the Bachelor degree, the candidates are required to take the seaman’s state board exam. In order to become a registered seaman in the Philippines, an applicant should have a valid Seafarer’s Identification and Record Book (SIRB) from the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA), which is a document proving the applicant has passed the minimum standard requirements as a licensed mariner for the seamanship profession and trade.

Many seafarers put great effort into joining the ranks of seafaring relatives and friends. They sacrifice their time, money and energy, and leave their homes just to become a seafarer. However, they often do not anticipate the many problems, which will arise once they have reached their goal and found employment working for a shipping company. The lifestyle, they worked so hard to achieve, is a whole new world of unimagined problems and troubles. The newly recruited seafarer is often surprised at the length

of their working day and its physical and emotional demands. They perhaps never considered how much they were themselves sustained by friends and family, and only come to realize this in the course of their lives away from home. Even after ten or twenty years at sea many seafarers continue to find loneliness to be problem. Yes, of course, they were aware of these possibilities. But now once on board, they are facing reality and it all feels so different. The possibility and the reality are really two different pairs of shoes.

Once the problem of loneliness is somehow faced and accepted, another problem arises. The question being, how to continue as a good spouse when separated from loved ones, thousands of miles away. Yes, modern technical solutions such as smart phones, tablets, and laptops do enable the family to keep in touch, but inevitably the limitations of these communications challenge a seafarer to question his contribution to his family as a husband and parent. However, compared to the past, when communication was only possible through letters (long distance telephone calls were only possible when the ship was docked and were also very expensive), these mobile phone technologies are a definite improvement.

Seafarers are very challenged by questions regarding their responsibilities as fathers in raising their children. They themselves miss being away from their children and mobile phone conversations are no substitute for the physical warmth of being together as a family.

The seafarer is torn between being unable to be the provider of both financial and emotional stability for his family. However, the family financial circumstances prevent him from remaining at home where he knows he should be contributing to the emotional stability and growth of his family. Being at sea on the long contracts, which are usual, he perhaps sees his children only once a year during a very short vacation. The seafarers' children grow up with their friends, their mother, grandma etc., but where is the father¹ who can model good behavior, teach them, train them up and guide them in finding their path for the future? Where is the love and care of the father that children long for? More questions take shape, such as: "What kind of school should I send my children to?" What will be the quality of the education?" And, "where should we live – which place provides the best environment for growing up?"

¹ There are also few women working on cargo ships. However, more women are employed on cruise ships.

Some seafarers might also ask themselves: Was it a mistake to become a seafarer? How can I prepare for old age? How can I even bring up my children when I am not home? Is there anything I can pass on to them even though I live separated from them? There's no end to all the questions and doubts that can plague seafarers. I don't know the answers to these questions, and I realize that some questions are very hard to answer. However, I hope to help and encourage you with a few ideas, suggestions and guidelines and the testimonies of other seafarers from which there is much to be learned. Moreover, I will show you a few guidelines from the Bible. We have received numerous emails from seafarers confirming that such biblically based guidelines are indeed helpful. The Creator of all mankind passed on to us these guidelines. It is Jesus who understands seafarers better than anyone else. He spent more than 30 years on this earth separated from his Father in Heaven. He experienced and understands loneliness. He understands how it feels to be separated from home. He understands you very well because he made the greatest sacrifice of all time. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus gives us encouragement: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* There is no problem that Jesus cannot handle. It makes him happy when we come to him, because he cares for us. Did you know that in the Old Testament there is a passage about the perilous lives of seafarers? Psalm 107:23-30 describes seafaring in these ancient times: *"Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven."*

It is my hope this book will hearten, encourage and strengthen you. May God bless you as you sail on the vast oceans of the world!

Finally, I would encourage you to respond with your comments, questions and ideas. Please let me know if you were helped by this book and if so, in what way. I will do my best to answer your mails as soon as possible. My email address is: M.Otto@allianzmission.de

Acknowledgements

This book has been made possible only through God's grace and the help of many seafarers, especially Melody Julian, who sent me interviews, ideas, proposals, prayers and who encouraged me to continue writing. The list would be too long to mention everyone, but I still want to name Captain Kennette Clavel, Captain Danilo Bueno and Captain Rodrigo Failma, Captain Nelson Sotelo, as well as Chief Cook Geovanie Daleon, whose wonderful contributions enhance this book. Mrs. Jessica Segundo, the secretary of the Seamen's Christian Friend Society in Manila, also deserves heartfelt thanks for taking the time to interview the children of seafarers. Mike Burleigh from Sailor Society did a great job in proofreading. And lastly, I would like to thank Marcy Schoenke, who put this book into readable English. Without her efforts my labors would have been in vain. This is the fourth book she has helped me with. May the Lord reward you Marcy for by so helping this one person you have helped, God only knows how many seafarers?

Endorsements

I have read with great interest *The Seafarer's Mind*, the new book from Reverend Martin Otto. Martin's books, of which this is the fifth, are written in such a way that Christian seafarers, and ship visitors like myself, can easily identify with the very real challenges seafarers face with a life at sea.

Personally, the thing I like the most about Martin's books, is the fact that they contain plenty of testimonies from seafarers themselves. These testimonies give the reader insight into how seafarers are helped by their Christian faith.

I thoroughly recommend *The Seafarer's Mind*.

May you, as the reader, find guidance with the support of other seafarers who have found help from Christ. Martin, thank you for this new gift in seafarer ministry – may our Lord bless you in your ship visiting and writing ministry in the port of Hamburg.

Revd. Alexander Eberson,
Sailors' Society
Port chaplain Terneuzen (Netherlands) and Ghent (Belgium)

Martin Otto has written several books that have been a blessing for both seafarers and those interested in working with them. This book is a practical look at many of the key issues that seafarers deal with on a regular basis. He has the ability to help us understand the complexities of working at sea. As a port chaplain I was able to gain a greater understanding of what seafarers are going through both on the ships and back at home with their families.

I was surprised to know of many of their struggles, but I think it's wonderful how God is working through them to bring seafarers into his kingdom and closer to him. I pray that many seafarers will read this book so they can better understand how to deal with the ship's life and more quickly find God's presence to help them navigate through life at sea.

Mark Wodka
Port Chaplain
Canaveral – USA
Port Ministry International (PMI)

Ensuring that you have your firm foundation anchored on Jesus Christ is the most important decision you will ever make as a seafarer. Diligently and faithfully seek to know Him and His will for your life. Be equipped and ready when the storms of life are come rushing to push you down. At the end of the day, no matter what threats, storms or waves of ocean may overwhelm you, you can rest assured that He is still in control.

This book aims to help you by inspiring you with real accounts of seafarers onboard who would like to give light and hope to those who need it most. They are offering you sound advice, encouragement, guidance and sense of direction to point you to the Only True God, the Living God who has power over the seas and winds to keep you standing firm on your Christian faith. I pray that this book will bless you as much as it has blessed me.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

Capt. Joel Abutal MM. MSc,
President
Philippine Merchant Marine Academy (PMMA)
Philippines

Bro. Martin's compilation of seafarer's experiences, are authentic and real life experiences. Congratulations again on your new book which I believe will be used to encourage other seafarers to serve more in the vineyard of the Lord. God's anointing is on the author of this book. Continue to be a blessing to us seafarers Bro. Martin. You are a blessing indeed!!

Your brother, in His grace!

Capt. Nestor M. Vargas
Fleet Manager
Michaelmar Philippines Inc.

In this book Martin Otto shows with empathy and a deep understanding what the concerns and challenges are that is constantly weighing on the minds of many seafarers. Best of all, seafarers are speaking for themselves and explain the dilemmas they are facing every day, such as doing what they are doing for their families, but at the same time, in many ways, sacrificing their families. The price for being a seafarer is often very high and

leads to a sense of being trapped. What for many seafarers begins as a dream, ends up as a nightmare.

Well done to Martin for weaving together a rich description of the problem, but also for pointing out and showing with compassion and understanding the way to the Solution: The God of relationship, friendship and not the God of religion. Christ's forgiveness and grace are presented as the answer that will lead to healing and restoration. This includes very practical help with important aspects of the seafarers' lives such as marriage, parenting, improving communication, overcoming temptations and so much more.

I enjoyed reading the book very much. Well done for writing another excellent book!

Thank you, Martin, and all the seafarers who participated in making this wonderful book possible. I strongly recommend this book to seafarers, families and friends of seafarers as well as anyone involved in the wonderful ministry to seafarers.

Chris Viljoen PhD
Port Chaplain,
Durban, South-Africa
Christian Seaman's Organisation

I just finished reading your impressive book about the life and struggles of the seafarers.

Your new book "The Seafarers' Mind" is more than a narration of what is going inside the minds of seafarers on board. It is a collection of both dramatic and inspiring real-life stories of seafarers in their hearts as they traverse the seas and return to land. It is a thought-provoking book, which opened my eyes and touched my heart to the human struggles and spiritual victories of seafarers, how they work on the ship despite loneliness and sickness, how they try to keep marriage and family together at home. The book shows the reader the human side of seafarers, who are not anonymous machines, but human beings with hope despite despair, faith despite temptations. The life-situation of seafarers shows the dark side of globalized commerce and world-wide poverty today: how people are forced to abandon their homes for survival, how they endure inhuman working conditions for the sake of their loved ones left behind. This book

gives tribute and respect to the challenging life of seafarers, which is often ignored and forgotten. It also gives bible-based spiritual guidance to Christian seafarers and workers in the maritime industry. I recommend this book to anyone who seeks to understand the plight of the seafarers, as well as their faith and hope.

Fr. Simon Boiser SVD
Port Chaplain
Stella Maris – Hamburg
Germany

As a Port Chaplain myself, this is a must read. 'The Seafarer's Mind' will be a reminder for me for many years to come. Like Martin's previous work, this book has guided my missionary work and seafarers are moved by it. It's such an emotional piece of work too! The author was able to touch my heart as he shared about some common life challenges. It is an inspiring book, which I have recommended to my fellow Chaplains.

Mark Classen
Port Chaplain,
Richards Bay – South-Africa
Mission to Seafarers (MtS)

Through the years, many books have been written about the glorious vocation of Seamanship. I've read beautiful books about life at sea; about exciting adventures, frightening tales about ocean mishaps, battling the forces of nature, about the allure of sailing the worlds' oceans and visiting distant lands. Books with beautiful pictures of the elegance of ships old and new. ...but this is the first book that I have read which provides an introspective look at what goes on in the mind of a seafarer, something many other books ignore or gloss over. Through first-hand accounts, it dissects the effect of separation from his/her family, spouse or children: the doubt, fear, confusion, and loneliness that comes with the job. It unashamedly raises questions about legacy, parenting and faith. These are the realities of the vocation and correctly need to be explored, together with the good and the glorious.

Martin Otto has written a genuinely important book about an aspect of a sailor's life not normally discussed. It is a book that looks at the seafarer as a 'complete' person, both human and spiritual. It is much more than just the sum total of their talents and experiences. It brings to life Teilhard de Chardins' words – "*We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.*" This literary work will help many sailors navigate a safe and successful passage for their careers and their family. I highly recommend it to all our great seafarers and professionals who work on board ships. In fact, it should be recommended reading for all of us that are responsible for the careers of our seafaring brothers and sisters.

Jose Ramon Garcia
President
Ventis Maritime Corporation
Manila, Philippines

As I read Martin's latest book I was quite emotional because I could identify with so many of the stories and experiences shared. This book reveals the heart cry of the many unseen workers of our world who transport around 90% of world trade across the vast oceans of our world. Do you feel trapped by circumstances of bad life choices? Do you find family happiness and marriage vows to be slipping? This wonderful book will encourage you to find the answers in the One who can help where all other solutions fail. God is our loving heavenly Father and he wants the best for you in this life and in the life to come. This book will help you in re-evaluating your priorities and in valuing the priceless things in your life. Thank you again Martin for giving a voice to the voiceless and hope to those in need of Christian encouragement. In this book may you find the mind of Christ for you and your family. One seafarer recently told me "as I read Martin's book on temptation I found my mind was changed". Salute to the seafarers 'Heroes of the Sea'.

Colin Jenkins
Port Chaplain
Cork – Ireland
Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)

Foreword

The world's dependence for seafarers, while often not appreciated by the public in general, is critical. The contemporary lifestyle of the world's population is only possible because of the maritime industry with shipping being described as the "lifeblood of world trade". What is not so readily acknowledged is that the seafarers remain the lifeblood of shipping. Because seafaring is transnational in nature, the world's roughly 1.6 million seafarers have not been able to form a pervasive and strong global constituency (relative to others) that has a strong voice in how they are treated. This has led to a situation where conditions and employment practices in some sectors of the shipping industry are less than optimal. Ironically, despite the widespread public ignorance of the industry and the contribution of seafarers to the lives of almost all people, many young people from specific countries have dreams and ambitions of working on ships in different capacities. Unfortunately, the reality that confronts them when they do get the chance to sail is often somewhat different from what they had dreamed of. It is not easy to avoid the disillusionment that can set in as the result of the long hours, the loneliness arising from being so far away from family and friends, and the unrelenting challenges of the sea itself as those of the commercial pressures shipping is exposed to. For many, the greatest motivation for staying at sea becomes only the need for finances to sustain the lives of loved ones ashore and to secure assets for what is uncritically perceived as "a successful life". Many do truly thrive at sea, but a lot more seem only to survive rather than thrive.

From years of experience and conversations with seafarers, Martin Otto has written an empathetic and compassionate book that recognizes the questions, dilemmas and challenges of seafarers. This is a unique book in that, contrary to many others which do not necessarily give a voice to seafarers, this book recounts seafarers' experiences and challenges from their own mouths – narratives from *The Seafarer's Mind*. Good solutions are best shared by others who have walked in our shoes. In an engaging and insightful narrative, the book points all readers – and seafarers in particular – to the only ONE who can satisfy the deepest longings of man as experienced by seafarers. The truth expressed in the many narratives is

not restricted to seafarers; indeed, as the Bible shows “all is vanity” without Christ. However, the frustration of the human heart without Christ, can be accentuated by the difficulties of a life at sea.

As I read the book, I recollected the faithfulness of The Lord Jesus Christ in my own life as a former seafarer. I recall my first time at sea, my ship leaving the berth, the mass of water between me and the shore increasing, opening up. I remember very well asking myself then, what I had gotten myself into with my choice to go to sea despite having many other excellent professional choices. Despite those early qualms, I can say, unequivocally, that the Lord led, strengthened, closed doors, opened others and saw me through my time at sea. In all those experiences, I can testify that HE IS FAITHFUL AND IS IN CONTROL. His faithfulness and control are still continuously present in my life many years after leaving a life at sea.

This book has significant relevance in clearly showing how challenging a life committed to the sea can be. However, as one who without apology and regret has trusted in Jesus Christ, I deem the most important contribution of this book to be its pointer to JESUS CHRIST and its invitation to all to commit to Him; the One who will never leave those who places their trust in Him, and who calls all to come to Him and find rest!

Psalms 107:23-31 is indeed appropriate for the seafarer, not only for its direct relevance to the seafarer and to the reality of the physical environment in which he or she sails. It is also very relevant because it is God's Word addressing much more than the physical storms at sea. It also speaks clearly to the spiritual, emotional and deep-seated insecurities and frustrations of all men

Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, They see the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! (New King James Version of the Bible)

As we all do business in “great waters”, in the affairs of men and in the ups and downs of life, may we be open to and see the works of the LORD; may we be witnesses and testifiers of His wonders in the deep – both in the circumstances around us and in the depths of our hearts. May we experience His calming presence in our hearts, even when our emotions rise and fall with the challenges we face. When we do not know what to do and have no answers to our numerous questions; when we are confused, staggering from thought to thought and at our wits’ end, may we turn to the ONE who alone is the Answer and who can calm our storms and bid the waves be still. May He guide us to the safe harbour of Himself and the desired haven of His will! May He quiet our souls and satisfy them and may He be pleased with our testimony, our thanks, our praise and lives that are worthy of His Name! Jesus Christ is The All-Sufficient ONE who died and rose for our salvation, justification and glorification. He is good and He will do it!

For the seafarer today (and any other person) who trusts in Him, as He has done over and over, He is able to turn loneliness into the solitude in which we meet Him day to day, our storms into unparalleled peace (the peace the world cannot understand), stumbling blocks of temptation into stepping stones to victory, and make those who trust Him missionaries to the world.

I am glad that Martin has written this book and thank all those without reservations shared their stories and testified of God’s goodness! I invite you, as you read it to respond to Martin’s invitation at the end of the book and to taste and see that the Lord is good. While it is targeted at seafarers, I hope many others will read it. The difficulties the seafarers’ recount, while exacerbated by the conditions of a life at sea, are not unique to seafarers. There are many more who appear to have all the things that seafarers lack, but who contend with the same questions and more. You may even be a port missionary who is doing good works by reaching out as a charitable act – or as a job – to the “poor seafarers” and yet not know yourself the true fellowship with Jesus Christ. May the testimonies of the seafarers in this book challenge you to come to the ONE who came to give LIFE and to give it more abundantly (John 10:10).

I trust that the many seafarers who read this will be blessed, encouraged and will seek Jesus with all their hearts and might. He not only walked in our shoes but also went on to die for us and rose again in victory. May all seafarers who read this book come to know the saving grace of Jesus

Christ and walk in victory with Him. For those who have surrendered to His Lordship, may the book and the accounts in it, strengthen your faith and remind you of the tools you have in Christ to walk worthy of Him and bless others.

As I pray for blessings of The LORD GOD on this book, may I also ask you to please pray for Martin and many like him who minister to seafarers, and just as importantly, to pray for our brothers/sisters, sons/daughters and fathers/mothers who are privileged to serve the global community as seafarers and who sacrifice and endure so much in doing so. May the good LORD bless them, that they may be a blessing, and may He bless you too!

Dr. Michael Ekow Manuel
Professor / Nippon Foundation Chair
Head of Maritime Education & Training (MET) Specialization
World Maritime University, Malmö, Sweden

I. I'm finally a seaman!

(The following passage summarizes the typical recollections of many seafarers recounting to me their experiences and emotions up to and during their first year at sea)

This is a very special day! Here I am, at the graduation ceremony of our maritime school. My mind full of impressions and memories / all kinds of thoughts are racing through my mind and I'm so happy because I have successfully completed my training and exams. I can't believe it. Is it really true? The years have flown by and in a little while I will finally receive the certificate for which I have worked so hard. Everything is completed except for the board exam which will fully qualify me as a seaman. Finally! I am so proud! My parents and relatives are proud of me too. I have really made it. After a few months of searching I have even found a job and was given my first contract in a manning agency. What a blessing, I thought. For a moment, I even started to think about God. Did he help me during all my studies? I am pretty sure he did.

Months later...

I have started on my first vessel. It is a container ship sailing between Asia and Europe. How exciting everything has been. But now the questions begin: What will it be like? Will I have good or bad experiences? Will my employer be satisfied with my work? Will I be able to adjust to life at sea? Will I be able to manage the hard work on board? Will I make friends on the ship? In any case I want to do well, so I am optimistic. There's one thing for sure: I don't want to disappoint anyone. I want to show everyone that I'm a capable and trustworthy seafarer.

My first trip took me from Singapore to Rotterdam. Everything seemed ok. The people on board welcomed me warmly and I felt well enough prepared for my first trip. However, it turned out to be really hard to adjust to the first few days. Some of the work was harder than I had imagined. I was tired every night, but happy to at last be earning my living as a seaman. One day I experienced something new: The ship was rolling and pitching so much that it made me feel sick. I even had to vomit. I was seasick. The next morning the weather was no better, plus I had a terrible headache! Feeling as bad as I did it was hard to have to get out of my bunk

and go to work. My headache didn't get better. I wondered how I would survive that day. While I was thinking about all this, the bosun² called for me to help with the painting. I was to help the others who were already working. At dinner I asked for a pain pill and after taking it I soon felt better. I took the time to sit around with some of the other colleagues and at around 10.30 p.m. I decided to go to bed. I was excited to see what the next day would have in store for me. Would I get seasick again? Even more importantly: would my superiors be pleased with how I was settling into life at sea? I just hoped and prayed that my work would be good enough so that I could continue working on international cargo ships. I am still dreaming of a good career. I wanted to be a captain one day. How long would that take? What kind of energy and discipline will I need in order to achieve my goal? I have many dreams, thoughts and ideas. What will the future bring? Before I was going to my bunk, I wrote to my parents. They always supported me; I really owe them my heartfelt thanks. How can I repay them? Hopefully they will be able to be proud of my career at sea.

Melody Julian, a Filipina by birth sent us her experience about her dreams of becoming a seafarer on a cruise ship. This is what she wrote:³

I had never imagined myself working on a ship and earning a good salary.

I come from a poor family where indulgence in life was not a priority. As a young girl, I only dreamt of helping my parents provide financial support for my education as well as that of my younger siblings. When I was in high school, we moved to a squatter area.

I have known Jesus since I was a kid; we used to attend Sunday School at our local church. Although we didn't have much and most of the time, we lacked certain things, my childhood was amazing! And in spite of being bullied in school because we were very poor, it didn't stop me from studying hard and holding on to my dreams.

As I grew older, life seemed to be harder than I had ever imagined. There was a time when my siblings and I cried because of hunger. My mom would plead for credit at the nearby "Sari-sari Store" so she could buy instant noodles (that was a small shop in the Philippines where you could buy basic foods in smaller portions). One good thing was, mom was blessed with a "green thumb" which meant that whatever she planted,

² Bosun = receives work instructions from the officers and passes the work on to the seafarers on deck.

³ Permission granted from the seafarer to print this article.

grew. She would plant vegetables and we would walk around our village trying to sell them. I also tried to collect trash, looking for plastic and bottles or any other recyclable materials to sell to the junk shop. We had a difficult, but a happy and simple life.

I promised myself I would finish my studies so that I could help our family.

I was blessed and obtained a scholarship for college so that my parents wouldn't have to worry about trying to somehow find the money to pay for tuition.

I was so eager to complete my studies because I believed education was one of the keys to success. I graduated with a degree in Business Management, and my parents were so proud of me when I walked onto the stage for commencement, because I was the first one in my family to get a college degree. By the way, I am the 3rd of the 10 children. My older brother and sister were working illegally in Japan that time. They worked to pay for the education of my other siblings and I. I knew that as illegal aliens, they didn't really have a good life there but still did their best to support us.

After finishing college, my only dream was to get a decent job, which would enable me to support my family and pay for their everyday expenses.

My first job was as a Data Encoder at a small company. It was a decent office job, which paid the minimum wage. I had finally become one of the breadwinners in the family. I supported my younger siblings who were still studying. I never dreamed of working abroad, I was content with my job, we were now able to eat three meals a day and even sometimes more often than that!

I did grocery shopping for the family and we sometimes went out to our favorite fast food restaurant, Jollibee...!! Those simple things were rewards for all the sacrifices my parents, my brother and sister and I had made.

Then I met Marlo once again in 2009. (He is my husband; we had been classmates in high school.) After we had been together for six months, he went to Dubai for work. Our relationship continued on a long-distance basis for a year until he helped me find a job there. I was blessed to find a position at a five-star hotel in Dubai although I didn't have previous training or experience in the hospitality industry. We spent five years working there until 2015 and resigned when we had saved enough money to get married.

We tied the knot on May 10, 2015 (my 29th birthday!) and after two months we applied for work on a cruise ship. We got hired, but unfortunately not on the same ship. We decided to accept the offers even though we knew it was going to be difficult for us. We were both Christians, so we hoped God would help us.

We left home again in 2016 for our first contract on the cruise ships. Before that, we actually prayed that God would grant us work as seafarers, so we could earn enough money for land and a house and start a family in the near future.

I expected to be able to save a lot of money when I joined the ship. I also thought I would be able to serve there as a Christian. But it was really tough, especially because it was the first time I was separated from my husband. Many people had already told us that life as a seaman would be difficult because of the temptations, homesickness, seasickness, long hours of duty (12-hour shifts), no days off, etc. Nevertheless, I expected to be able to minister easily on board. It wasn't that easy because life on a ship is totally different than life on land. The culture is different, the temptations are worse, the people are different. You need a lot of patience with people and trust God that He will help you with everything. You go through struggles while you are dealing with different types of people and different cultures. For example, in the Philippines, many people are more conservative, unlike the Europeans and Westerners who are more liberal. And gossip on board runs like wildfire. There are times when you don't know what to believe anymore. Most of the time, the type of entertainment is attending a party with a theme at the crew bar. Sometimes there are sports tournaments, or you can go on a tour with the crew at a port. These are examples of how the company tries to alleviate the homesickness and boredom of the crew members.

It's also hard to be a Christian on board for various reasons: you have no one to fellowship with; although you keep up with prayer and devotions, it is good but not always enough. You need someone to share your faith with or your faith will become weak. One thing I realized is if you feel alone because no one is willing to have fellowship with you or read the Bible with you, you might feel like you are missing out on something, unless you realize that maybe God wants to use you to share His word with others. Maybe He wants you to make the effort to share your faith so that others can hear the Word of God.

One thing I learnt as a Christian is that if no one on board is willing to take the time for fellowship or bible study, you will be missing out on something. However, you will also miss out on something if you don't

realize that God wants to use you to reach out and tell others about the Word and about your faith.

After a few years of being a Christian seafarer, I now understand how important the Great Commission is. Jesus did not say it would be easy, but He did say that he would be with us even to the end of the world. As a Christian, it is necessary for us to stand firm in our faith and make His word and His promises our foundation. In other words, life on board is not easy, but I can enjoy it when I know that I have nothing to fear and when I believe that God will not forsake me or leave me, and that He will divide the oceans and conquer the giants in our lives when we need Him.

It is also a blessing to be able to travel various places in the world for free and be paid a good salary! It is amazing, and even more than that: God is so amazing! Now, when I look back, I would say I have been blessed beyond all measure!

All Glory to Jesus!

Melody Julian

Another seaman I met was Melquesidex⁴, who worked on a cruise ship. He also was surprised to learn just how different the life he had imagined was from the reality of months at sea. Here is his testimony:

At first I didn't plan to become a seafarer. I wanted to be a male nurse and work in the U.S. Unfortunately, I did not meet all of the necessary requirements at a certain university. So, I ended up as a seaman. I reasoned that I would still be earning dollars even if I wasn't a nurse. As a seafarer I dreamed of becoming an officer on the ship.

Unfortunately, I was not able to take the officer's license exam in 1997 due to the incorrect spelling of my name. While I collected information about how to correct my name and through it gained insights and ideas, I became hesitant because the entire correction procedure took six months. The court hearing took three months and then the newspaper publication was three months. (Publication was necessary to complete the process.) The salary difference between ratings⁵ and a third officer was just immaterial. It wasn't big enough to motivate me to be an officer. I think it was only US\$ 300. I didn't want to go through the six-month processing and waiting period and spend money for all of it and not be able to earn money. I was impatient. I wanted everything to

⁴ Granted from the seafarer to print his experiences.

⁵ All people working on ship who are not officers.

be done quickly. So, I decided to go back on board and just set my mind to work and earn money to fulfill my dreams. I had also promised my parents to help them to build their dream house before I got married, and then I wanted to support them financially, even after being married. In the past I had a high regard for myself / thought highly of myself based on my achievements and accomplishments. I thought everything was done through my power and my hard work. I was very wrong, because it was by the grace and mercy of God who blessed me with divine wisdom and understanding.

2. What is home? Where is home?

What a strange question you may ask. But many seafarers who work at sea for a long time face certain real problems. They are away from home for 6 to 12 months at a time. Then they may spend 2-3 months at home for vacation, but all too often shipping companies require that they dedicate some of their vacation to various training courses, which may sometimes reduce their time at home to only one month's vacation. This is definitely not enough to recharge the inner batteries. These reductions in the time a seafarer is actually able to spend with his family give rise to a serious question. Where is the seafarers real home? Of course, people tend to say: My home is where my family lives. But if you spend nine months away from home and you enjoy only one month of vacation, you might wonder if home is really home with the family or maybe on the ship?

David Hawkins⁶, who was sailing on cruise ships himself, and Port Chaplain Jeannette Seal tell us about the Dilemma of seafarers.

It is hard to describe the melancholy that can overwhelm a man at sea. The world economic situation is driving more and more men to work on ships. Even when he doesn't have much to return to, the pull of home can be deep and strong. The problem is, of course, spiritual, but for men without faith, they must place their trust elsewhere.

For those of us who work with seafarers, it comes as no surprise that the men are counting the days until they go home. It's also no surprise that they spend so much money on lap-tops and phone calls talking to their wives and children or the girl they hope to marry someday. We know it's a good day when they get a message from home, no matter what else may be happening. We experience their joy when someone at home says a sleepy "hello" into a cell phone, no matter what time of day it may be at home. We watch them talk with their wives and children or girlfriends, now on laptops with video calling over the Internet. This new style of communication helps so much. They daydream about their next visit home or dwell on the good times of their last visit. Every crew-member is fighting loneliness and homesickness, sometimes giving in to

⁶ Jeannette Seale and David Hawkins, Alaska Christian Ministries, USA. Permission granted to print this article.

temptations, which cause great anxiety, guilt, and shame. A combination of homesickness, loneliness, and expectation of seeing his family again causes his emotions to be on edge. But what is the dilemma? What does he find when he finally arrives at his front door and faces that family he has worked and sacrificed for?

For the first few days everyone is very happy to have daddy, husband, son, and brother home once again, and he doesn't mind being treated like a guest especially after many months of hard work. He is busy with family and friends and trying to catch up on rest and readjust to the time difference. But it isn't long until he realizes, that he actually is a guest in his own home. As the days wear on, his family and friends aren't very interested in his life at sea and feel he is bragging when he talks about the places he has been and seen. He can't talk about the stress of his job because no one can relate to his experiences. He has endless hours to kill because his family is involved with school and the day's activities in which he plays only a token part. Besides all of these frustrations, some of his precious leave time must be spent visiting the agent, getting his papers in order and updating his medical paperwork, often-times miles away from his home.

The spreading of western culture and its loss of traditional family structure and values becomes an even greater threat to a stable home. Wives are bombarded by the media to "live their own lives," "do their own thing," "have it all." It becomes next to impossible for them to maintain their integrity to be the trusted guardians of their homes and children that seafarer's wives have had to be in the past. Most returning seafarers find it difficult to empathize with this problem when they are the ones suffering from its fallout. A man discovers that his wife or girlfriend has her own social life, without him, and wants to continue that life even when he is home. He's only going to be home a few weeks or months and she tries to juggle her own personal social life with the "couple" aspect that he desires. He finds that his small children don't easily come to him; they might even hide behind their mother and cry. Much to his dismay, he is a stranger to his own children, only a voice on the telephone or face on the computer screen to the older ones. And to make things worse, the older children continue to view their mother as leader of the home instead of him. When he tries to discipline the children or wants to spend time with his wife, the children resent it. He senses he is in the way: he has no real "job" at home in the day-to-day operations. He spends frustrating days trying to reestablish his position as father and husband. He clashes with his wife over decisions in which he feels

he should have been included. His wife has, out of necessity, assumed the role of leader, making all major and minor decisions. She finds it very difficult to suddenly turn over those responsibilities to him. A seafarer tends to be easily parted from his money. He feels guilty about not spending time with his children for the many months he is away. Therefore, he smothers them with gifts and demands more of their time than they are willing to give. Men at sea usually earn more money than their relatives and neighbors, so when he realizes their desire to get on with daily chores and neglect him, he might become overly generous to re-stimulate their interest. We have seen this occur in many subtle forms, ranging from bringing home expensive gifts or “drinks all around” at the local bar, to a man allowing his property or vehicles (which are often damaged) to be used by others. A seafarer will often finance someone else’s business ideas which tend to use up his precious earnings with little or no return. The family he has worked so hard for begins to resent his presence more and more and ask when he is going to leave so they can get on with their lives. His time at home drags on for everyone involved. The bottom line is an erosion of respect for him.

The intense desire he had at sea, to find a job at home and stay with his family, vaporizes. The life at sea begins to look better and better and he now looks forward to leaving and going back to the life he only endured weeks earlier. This in itself causes stress, when he realizes what is happening. He must face the fact that the ship is more home to him than he thought, and his actual home is just his vacation spot. He returns to sea with a heavier heart than he anticipated. And chances are all of these problems will reoccur on his next visit home. As this pattern is repeated over the years an “us and them” mentality develops. “Us and them” has nothing to do with nationality, language, color, or job position. “Us” refers to seafarers, and “them” refers to shore – siders. The men struggle with this paradox, wanting to be appreciated at home but finding greater acceptance at sea. What happens to these men, even the ones who tell us repeatedly they want to find a job and stay at home? They return again to the sea. At first, we thought they just weren’t serious about staying home and gave them a hard time. Now as Christ has opened our eyes to their dilemma, we look at them with His compassion and see a man who is giving his life for a family he dreams of, a daddy whose kids don’t really know him, and a husband whose wife struggles when he’s gone and when he’s home. To be able to introduce this man to Jesus Christ, our Creator, Savior and Lord and our greatest friend, is

our foremost goal so that Christ can help him deal with this frustration and disappointment.

Contributed by Jannette Seale and David Hawkins, Alaska Christian Ministries, USA

The last day on a ship is always a happy day for seafarers, as they long to see the family again after a long hardworking contract. But for many, the dream of going home and finding rest and peace is very soon destroyed. A seafarer wrote of his homecoming experience as follows:⁷

Hi Martin, hope things are well with you and your family. I hope you can manage to have enough time to rest, considering your very busy days with the ship visits. These past weeks in my life have been a mixture of extreme emotions. We had a lot of happy times because of my sisters' visits and we managed to have good bonding moments before they returned back to the country, they work in. I am so thankful to be able to see them again and spend time with the whole family once again. But just a day after that, my own family had a very sad problem. My wife with whom I have been married for twelve years, suddenly admitted to me she had an affair last January for a couple of weeks. It was so devastating to me, Martin, since it happened just after my birthday last January. Of course, she was crying when she told me and honestly at that moment my whole body got numb. I didn't even know what to say or feel at that moment. I just froze and became blank. It was a day before my sisters left so my wife asked them to assist her so that she could tell me. She said she could not keep it as a secret to me for long, and since March she already had been talking to our Pastor for prayer and counseling. Both her and my sisters were praying on how to tell me and they were worried about how I would react and what I would do after that. It seems that I was the very last one to find out. So, my sisters asked me to meet them at the hotel they were staying in and then told me the truth. My wife told the truth in front of us all. It was a guy she worked with. Martin, just by telling you now my heart still feels like a knife is just piercing through it. She resigned from work in April.

She said she is willing to accept whatever decision I make. My sisters were very disappointed of course, but we decided not to tell our parents since they might not take it well due to their age and health. And my parents really are fond of my wife. I asked God why this happened to me. Of all people, I did not expect my wife would do such a thing. I asked her

⁷ Permission granted from the seafarer to print this article.

what happened and how she managed to do it. She was crying and told me that she doesn't know actually. She said it happened so fast, and by the time she realized what she had done she was overpowered by fear.

She had been worried for months until I came home, because she was afraid of my reaction. I was really angry at that moment, yet not at her, at the guy of course, but even more angry at myself. I feel like I'm the one that failed. Is it because I work far away, or I am not good enough? A lot of questions came to my mind: what has gone wrong, did I not pray enough? I was crying and everyone else was crying and with a deep need of prayer I turned to God at that moment. I said Lord what do you want me to do?

It is really painful, but I'm also thinking about my kids. What will happen to us now? What will happen to my kids? And with a leap of faith my lips just said "I forgive you" I was actually asking the same question, like everyone else. What? Are you sure? But I asked God, should I really do at this moment? My sister said that maybe what happened didn't sink in yet, but God gave me a tremendous sense of peace that moment. I told my wife how hurt I was, but I was willing to give her another chance for our family and because I know God still has something good planned for us despite what happened.

There are times the devil brings the pain back. Actually, every day he does it. But one thing God teaches me with this is that, forgiveness is a choice. You have to choose to forgive every day, or you will just suffer from pain, bitterness anger and all those negative feelings. We are still in the process of healing and every day I see my wife not as the person who cheated me, not as the dirty person she thinks herself to be right now, but the person who really feels so guilty that she wanted to give up on life. I wanted to take time for healing, but I know at this time my family needs me more. My wife needs to see that I still love her unconditionally despite what happened. I pray that she will not fall in the pit of self-pity and guilt. I tell my wife and my sisters that I choose to forgive. I can choose anger or bitterness, but God is teaching me that forgiveness is always the best choice. We all have fallen short of God's standard and I don't honestly know how I have chosen to forgive. Every day there is a grace from God and every day we pray for guidance. There are still times when the enemy tries to rob me of the peace and joy my heart, but me and my family always pray every day and every night holding hands. Martin, please pray for me and my family, that we may continue to hold on to the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sorry for this long email and many thanks to you. *(Name was deleted to protect the identity of the seafarer)*

3. This loneliness is driving me crazy

Seafarers should know that Port Chaplains like myself could be invited to visit their ship simply to meet and chat and more importantly for a Christian, to provide Fellowship in prayer. You will find in the appendices to this book a section titled 'Port Chaplains', this gives the apps and websites for Christian Charities where you will find the email address and contact details for Chaplains in ports around the world. These men and women will be delighted to receive your message inviting them to visit your ship to meet with you for fellowship and prayer and may also offer you the gift of a Bible for yourself or even a children's storybook Bible for you to read to your children.

Fellowship with other believers is vital to us Christians, which is the main reason why we are here for you Seafarers as Chaplains. However some of the advice we might offer along with our prayers draws upon agencies such as 'SeafarerHelp, the 'ITF' (International Transport Workers Federation) Seafarer's Union and 'ISWAN' (International Seafarers Welfare and Assistance) all of which have helpful websites and phone Apps. To illustrate how helpful these various agencies can be we have included in the Appendices three pages on the subject of 'Sleeping Well at Sea' from one of the many ISWAN booklets, which are available for download.

With regard to the information in these books I would draw your attention as a Chaplain to the fact that the ISWAN 'SHIP' Booklet 'Steps to Positive Health' carries an article on 'Mindfulness' a Buddhist Yoga practice. 'Mindfulness' is not to be compared with a Christian's prayer as a child of God to his Father in Heaven. Jesus Christ gave us His Prayer "Our Father which art in Heaven...." which is a prayer we pray standing beside Jesus the Son of God as he says "Our Father".

Loneliness is a burden on the heart for almost every seafarer. An experience of isolation for those away from home for the first time which continues to be felt down the years by those leaving a wife and children behind. But for very many seafarers the sadness of the experience is deepened by worries about the situation at home compounded by concerns for their own future as providers. Many seafarers go as far as to say, that loneliness is the number one problem among them. There is hardly a week in which the seafarer does not mention loneliness. A seafarer once

called me on my mobile phone and asked me to visit him on his ship. I told him that I would come in about one hour. When I reached the ship, he waved to me and was happy that I came on board. He then confessed that he felt so lonely and isolated that he felt like going home right away. I asked him if it would help him to pray about the matter and he agreed. He was happy and relieved when I prayed to Jesus to take care of him. Finally, he wanted a Bible, as he felt it would help him a lot, in times of loneliness, to come closer to God, and read about what God has in mind for seafarers. Jamesel M. Manisan⁸, a Chief Mate⁹ working on container ships said the following when asked about loneliness:

Loneliness is the biggest enemy of a seafarer's life. Especially if you have longer contracts and your ship is in a busy trade like a taxi. Every human being has feelings. The worst feelings are when you feel loneliness. You will feel especially lonely when you have no relationship to God, when God seems far away. Sometimes you become dependent on alcohol and cigarettes to deal with your emotions, but they only provide temporary relief. My experience was that loneliness vanished when I completely put my trust in God.

In the following testimony, George¹⁰ tells us about the loneliness he felt and how he began to deal with it.

I am now sitting here in my cabin on a ship that sails over the vast oceans. It is my first day and it feels so strange. I am tired from my 20-hour flight. I left Manila to board the ship in Rotterdam. My mind is racing with so many questions. Why am I here? Why did I choose this job on the ship? How do my wife and children feel? I can't stop crying. I keep thinking about the farewell at the airport in Manila, when I had to say good-bye to my wife and children. My younger son's question comes back to me: Daddy, when will you come back home? When I tried to answer his question, he said something which made me even sadder: Daddy, please don't go". That broke my heart. My wife was speechless too – There were only tears in her eyes. I sensed that she wanted to say something, but she was probably so overwhelmed by emotion that she

⁸ Permission granted by Chief officer to print his personal experience.

⁹ Chief Mate = First officer, who is responsible for the cargo on board and at the same time responsible for all deck crew.

¹⁰ Name changed to protect his identity

couldn't say a word. For a while we all kept quiet and looked at each other. How much do I hate these situations. I didn't want to let my son see the tears in my eyes, so for a moment I excused myself walked away and dried my tears before I came back. Then it was time to board the plane. My son cried even more. He didn't want to let me go. I hugged him and my wife one last time and went through the gate waving good-bye to them. I couldn't think clearly. What will happen if I don't see them again? Of course, I knew that this question wouldn't help me now, so I pushed the thought away. I don't feel it is human to leave the family for nine months at a time, stay at home for two months and leave again for nine months. Every time I'm back on the ship, I wonder: How will I be able to sacrifice nine months again? How will I survive? I miss my family, and also my friends, so much. After a long flight with two stops in between I finally arrived at my destination. I was picked up by the ship's agent who drove me to the ship. Having arrived there, I greeted most of the crew and went into my cabin. This should be my home for the next nine months. All of a sudden, I heard a knock at the cabin door. I opened and greeted my colleague. I wondered how he was feeling. Should I tell him about my loneliness? Anyway, I decided not to share my feelings. Not this time. My colleague seemed to be a very kind person. He asked many questions like: Where are you from? How many kids do you have, and if it was my first contract on this particular ship. We talked for a while, and then he left the cabin again. Immediately the pain of loneliness overwhelmed me again. What should I do in this situation? Should I phone my wife? Or should I wait until the next day hoping that I will slowly get over the pain? I decided to phone and took my cell phone out of my bag. My wife answered the phone. She was very happy and relieved to know that I arrived safely on the ship. She was also very happy to hear my voice. We talked for only a few minutes and asked each other the usual questions. Speaking to my wife left me with a good and bad feeling. Yes, I was so happy to hear her voice, happy to hear that everything at home was in order, but on the other hand I felt even sadder because I sensed the separation between us. I was thousands of miles away from my loved ones. And I still have nine months to go before I can see my family again. How will I be able to battle the loneliness? Suddenly I noticed a book that the person who had lived in this cabin before me must have left. I looked more closely and saw that it was a Bible. I simply opened it and started to read. What was written there amazed me: *Psalms 23,4: Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are*

with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. I had heard that verse before. It was taken from the famous chapter 23 of the Psalms. For a moment I thought about that verse. I was somewhat comforted by what I read. I then looked at the New Testament and found a verse in the book of Hebrews 13, verse 5: *Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.* This really caught my attention. Is God really saying, that he will never leave me and never forsake me? If that is true, it means that he will be with me on this ship and that he will take care of me. I was astonished. I began wondering: If the Bible is so encouraging, so positive, why haven't I not read it more? I hadn't read the Bible for years, but now I decided that I wanted to read it as much as possible to find out who this God was, who has just encouraged me so much. As I was thinking about these Bible verses, I noticed that my loneliness had vanished. This encouraged me even more to start reading that book. As the negative feelings of loneliness disappeared and hope set in, I decided I would call my wife again and tell her about my experience. She picked up the phone and was happy to hear my voice again. Honey, what is going on? Why are you calling again? she asked. I then told her about the Bible I found in the cabin and that I had opened it and read these encouraging verses. She also was encouraged and said: If that is so, I must start reading it too. We continued chatting for a while and I noticed the wonderful atmosphere between us. I promised her to phone again very soon.

Another seafarer who shared with me the challenges he faces because of loneliness, said the following:

In the dictionary, loneliness is defined as causing feelings that come from being apart from family or other people. Loneliness is sometimes a result of being tired from working. Loneliness makes me sad and insecure and as a result, I think negatively toward other people. I often long for material things. I think, for example, that if I have a lot of money and have a business back home, I will not be away from my family. Before I was a believer in Jesus Christ, I struggled with loneliness. I became convinced that I could battle loneliness by having a lot of friends to talk with, drinking alcohol, going to parties, and then loneliness would be gone. When I was lonely, all kinds of thoughts came to mind. Loneliness really drove me mad. I got easily irritated about small things, and even an unanswered phone call ruined my day. But since I joined the Bible study for Christian fellowship on board, and I slowly began to change,

especially after accepting our Lord Jesus Christ in my heart. And following him, it was easier to deal with loneliness. Now I don't feel alone or lonely because I know that the Lord Jesus Christ is with me all of the time. This is what he said in Matthew 11:28-29 *"Come to me, all of you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls."* Now as a believer I seldom feel lonely because I have the Lord Jesus Christ, who is always with me. Yes, I miss my family especially when I just return on board, but I know in my heart that God is with them.

Mhoo Rolloque¹¹, a Filipino working on a container ship said:

"As a seafarer, the strongest feeling that comes to you is the feeling of loneliness, especially because we are separated from our family and friends. The feeling might even get worse when we are in the middle of the ocean and we can't pick up any signals on our phones so we can't call home. I remember not being at home when my family needed me most, but I thank God for his comfort which helped me and my family in that situation. I always pray to God that he will continue to comfort me when I feel lonely." It is interesting to note that many seafarers agree that the best comfort always comes from God, as it is mentioned in Isaiah 41:10 *"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*

¹¹ Permission granted to quote his experiences.

4. Am I stuck in a trap?

(The following passage summarizes the typical recollections of many seafarers recounting to me their experiences and emotions after many years at sea)

I always dreamed of having a good life. I hoped to have an exciting job with sufficient pay so that I would be able to feed my family and give them everything they needed. I really wanted to take good care of them. Now I think I am at least getting closer to achieving the financial goal. The temptation to earn a lot of money was so strong that I couldn't resist. In addition to that I hoped to see more of this world. People told me that once I was working on a ship my financial problems would be solved. But is that true? Yes, I certainly live better than most of the people in my country. But what is the price? Have I given up my freedom? Am I stuck in a floating prison for nine months at a time? Where is the freedom I was looking for? Here I work at least eight hours a day, sometimes more. My dream to see the world did not really come true, we arrive in port load/unload our cargo, turn-around and sail sometimes within hours, there is hardly any time to go ashore. I often have to work overtime, and that makes it very difficult to get away from the ship and visit places of interest. Where are the friends that I used to be with? I really miss them. Is money really all that matters? And don't I lose more than I gain by working on a ship? These questions bother me a lot, and actually more questions like that come to my mind. I sometimes become very frustrated. Questions, which make me doubt my career choice continually dishearten me: do I have enough time for my parents? They are getting older and Dad is not all that healthy. Thinking back about the wonderful times at home really makes me sad. Why did I ever leave home? Why did I give in to the temptation to earn money? Why was money so attractive? Is money all that matters? There's definitely one thing I've learned so far, and that is, money doesn't make you happy. What I really need is enough freedom and time to re-evaluate my life, consider possible alternative options and reach conclusions. But I can't quit my job on the ship right now because having just built a house there are huge bills to be paid. On top of that, the school fees for my children are very high. I have the feeling that I'm caught in a trap. Could that be the case? I sought freedom, financial freedom, and now things look quite the contrary. On

the one hand I'd like to go home right away and forget about life on board the ship, but on the other hand I need the money to pay off my financial obligations. There is the problem of finding work, which brought in earnings equivalent to my present work? If I were to leave the life of a seafarer, would I ever find employment at home, which would support my family and pay off the loan? I doubt it. I would need to find the funds for further study or re-training and would then have the challenge of looking for employment in a new career. However, due to my age none of this is possible. What therefore should be my next move? Where should I go? I'll have to fulfill the contract on my ship first. I'd really like to have time to sit down and think about the future. But there's so little time for that. The job really is hard, and I'm tired after a day's work. All I feel like doing is sleeping – I'm not in the right frame of mind to plan my life. I really am trapped. Who can help me out? Several times I tried drinking, but later I realized, that alcohol wasn't the solution at all. It made me feel even more disturbed. I wonder how my wife feels? Does she also feel trapped? Did she also have more expectations and hopes about my career? She has to raise the children all by herself. Her life is also hard, and she has to make many sacrifices.

The above summarizes many hours of conversations with seafarers as a Chaplain visiting ships. Therefore, I am confident, dear reader, that I am speaking on your behalf. How might I advise you to think through the ways forward? Actually, it is good to talk things through with your colleagues and ask them how they feel about working on a ship after so many years.

Talking to a seafarer from a cruise ship I learned that many seafarers seem to feel trapped, or at least they find that life on board is different from what they had expected. Pepito, a seafarer, said,

The reality about my work on ship was far different from my expectations. There are times when I get disappointed and sad, because I didn't become an officer, I'm only a second bosun. In the past, I felt insecure and I was envious of my friends who made it to the top and became captains. I should have made more effort and set certain priorities so that I could become a 3rd officer, 2nd officer, chief officer or even a captain.

One of the very experienced persons I asked was Captain Nelson Sotelo, a Filipino by birth, who presently works for a shipping company in Singapore. Here is his testimony:

Being a seafarer is a great challenge as life on the sea is never easy. It is a life apart from the normal life. Many Filipinos seem to think that seafaring is an easy profession that can easily be achieved by most people. They often see dollar signs rather than the price they have to pay in order to become a seafarer. Having a career at sea – which is tough – is more than just being physically fit and strong. The mental, physical and emotional strength required are all equally important. It takes a lot of courage and mental steadfastness to survive the daily life at sea. You should have a Divine Anchor to hold on to so that you will survive the great unknown across the ocean. Most shipping companies have changed their approach to hiring seafarers from sending ‘one seafarer with the right certificate to a vessel’ to sending ‘the most well-suited seafarer, with the right skills, experience and attitude to the right vessel’. In other words, it’s not simply about getting a diploma and acquiring training certificates but the whole package a seafarer can offer. Seeing new places shouldn’t be the primary motive. The popular saying, “Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore” is what needs to be considered. Moreover, despite the challenges, it is important for seafarers to know their purpose, the reason why they are on board, and to live it as well. It means seeing your job in a wider context. It means making a difference among the people you are with and the company you are working for. Furthermore, it also means being grateful for the lessons learned while crossing the great oceans and seeing the world which others cannot see. In understanding, why you are there, you will find peace and joy despite being separated from your loved ones and in spite of the different situations you will encounter.

Am I stuck in a trap? There is always the danger of a trap wherever we may be. It is how you perceive things, which makes the difference. I believe that making the best of where God has placed you and living it to the full will make your life more meaningful wherever you are. As a Christian seafarer, my goal is to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with the gifts he has given me and to live a life dedicated to His mission.¹²

Another report came from a wonderful friend, Captain Terry, and his wife Voon,¹³ born in Malaysia, but now residents of Australia. This is what they discovered when interviewing seafarers.

¹² Permission granted to quote Capt. Nelson Sotelo.

¹³ Permission granted to use this report.

“A career as a seafarer doesn’t always include options or choices.” We’ve heard of seafarers taking this career path as a means of improving their financial status. Some do it to save up for their first home so that they will gain the approval of their future wife or in-laws, in order get the go-ahead for marriage, such as is common in China. Whatever the reason, one can feel trapped along the way in this path, which they have chosen. The Captain, along with the Chief Officer, Chief Engineer and 2nd Engineer (called the Ship Management Team), can make life on board either pleasant or like hell. The personality of the Captain will influence the working environment or vibes on the ship. An accommodating and compassionate Captain, along with the Ship Management Team, will make life comfortable for the crew. A loud Captain, on the other hand, will be intimidating, causing fear among the crew, and that will result in a lack of concentration on the job. If family or personal problems get in the way, these can also cause a seafarer to feel trapped. Further difficulties might be: strained relationships among crew members, being enclosed in a small living space which is surrounded by water, with no possibility to get away on long sea passages. These can all contribute to depression. Depending on the length of time until the next port call, the trapped seafarer will have to suffer in silence. Other important issues are food on board – how good or bad it is; how far away a port is to the nearest town. These days ports are build in more remote areas and are thus far from surrounding towns. Taxi fares can be exorbitant and too expensive for many seafarers. Thus, there is little incentive to get away for a short time and take a break from life on board, and that is not helpful to the trapped and suffering seafarer. Most recently, with the advent of MLC and modern communication technologies, crew members are able to communicate with their families at home on a more regular basis. This has lessened the impact of feeling trapped onboard.

Finally, Elaine Riviera Ramos¹⁴ who works on a luxury yacht added these thoughts:

The only reason I feel trapped on a ship is that the sole responsibility for my family rests on my shoulders. I have to keep working in order to help them. No ship you go on will ever have a perfect environment to work in. I just have to finish my contract and do my job so that I can provide for my family.

¹⁴ Permission granted to print her article.

Some questions may arise at this point:

- Where can I find help when I feel trapped?
- What can I do as a seafarer to make sure that I will not feel trapped while working on a ship?
- How can I better prepare myself for joining the next ship?

There's no easy answer to these questions but thinking these issues through can already be a help and relief. May I recommend that you share these questions with fellow seafarers and learn from their experiences?

May I also encourage you to seek help from outside of your ship. If you are in a port, use the Wellness at Sea App (see appendix) to locate the Seamen's Centre or call upon the services of the Port Chaplain who will certainly would be more than willing to talk these issues through with you. The one help acknowledged by very many seafarers is prayer. Being spiritual brings it's own benefits. Praying regularly has been scientifically proved to have positive effects on life, on both body and soul. Praying is definitely the best way to start and end your day

5. Seafarers fears and worries

Fears and worries are very present in almost everyone's life. However, it seems to be that especially when you are far away from home and living in a totally different situation, fears and worries tend to increase. In many conversations on ships, I have learned that certain fears appear very threatening to many seafarers. One of the fears mentioned is working under a superior who does not treat his people nicely. Here a chief engineer relates his experience:

I have sailed on the high seas for 37 years, and for the past 26 years I have worked as a chief engineer officer on a wide variety of ships, including containers, crude oil tankers, heavy lift, and chemical tankers. Unfortunately, for a long time now, I have received information from junior officers that they are being treated poorly, "like dogs", by their superiors. It is of course a common thing in all levels of industry for young persons, starting out in their career to pay their dues and carry out what are often the lowliest or dirtiest jobs. But, a certain degree of respect should be there at all times.

I have had young colleagues tell me about nightmares they had when they heard that a certain captain or chief engineer was scheduled to board their vessel. This type of bullying behavior can cause a seafarer to stop sailing altogether, as they are so disappointed that their dream job has turned into such a nightmare.

Bullying is a safety hazard. I have seen the effects first-hand. The person being abused can be so afraid about been seen to have done something wrong that they conceal problems, change the figures of soundings, start losing their concentration, use spare parts or do not report a change in stock because of a mistake they made. They also lose sleep and show up tired on watch. In fact, all the terms in the abbreviation HSQE can be affected: one's health; one's sleep, safety; a person can "forget" or fail to re-

port defects on critical equipment, the quality of one's work or job performance suffers, the environment suffers; one's mental health and the team dynamics are adversely affected.¹⁵

The result of such poor treatment by superiors leads often to depression, according to an advanced study carried out by the Sailor Society. "Investigations into disasters at sea still indicate that anxiety, depression, and fatigue are a sad reality for many seafarers and could take a terrible toll on the decision-making abilities of the crew."

The society's recent health study of more than 1,000 seafarers, conducted in partnership with Yale University, indicated that more than a quarter of seafarers show signs of depression. Nearly half of the seafarers who reported symptoms of depression said they had not asked anybody for help, and only 21% had spoken to a colleague despite spending months on a ship together. Participants in the study also mentioned as having a big impact on their mental health, the quality and amount of food on board, the separation from their families and the lengths of their contracts.

In order to bring the subject of fear into the open, I have circulated questionnaires among seafarers on a number of different ships. Here are some of the responses. A Chief Cook said:

My fear is to be unable to perform my duty due to the rough seas. I am also afraid of accidents.

Others have said that they are greatly afraid of not passing the medical examination. Without a medical certificate you would not be able to get a contract with a shipping company. If you don't get a contract you will have a very hard time supporting your family at home. One captain added that many seafarers have no retirement plan. Why not? One of the reasons is that they don't trust insurance companies. Several seafarers mentioned that they had lost money because the insurance company went bankrupt or misused the money. Other interviews carried out by port chaplains in various ports revealed the following:

¹⁵ <https://safetyatsea.net/news/news-crew-wellbeing/2019/the-effects-of-bullying-on-crew/>, <https://safetyatsea.net/news/news-crew-wellbeing/2019/prioritise-crew-wellness/>.

- I miss so much important highlights in the lives of my children.
- I cannot handle the great pressure of my workplace.
- I am afraid that one day I will be too old to do the job on the ship.
- I am afraid of accidents as I know other seafarers who had accidents and were unable to continue working as a seafarer.
- I fear that I will not see my family again.
- I do not fear for myself, I only fear for my family and hope that they are healthy and safe.
- My greatest fear is to lose God. Because if you lose God everything is out of control and without God you do not care about what is inside of you. I hope it won't happen. I am always worried about my health. My family is young, and they need me, for I am their only provider. I need a healthy body in order to work for them, but working at sea is unhealthy.
- I am worried about my future and my kids, and that is why I chose to become a seafarer.
- The fears I have are bad weather and dangerous cargo operations.
- Our job is so risky. It is like riding in a coffin, that is why I tell my colleagues every day to act responsibly in everything.

(link: <https://safetyatsea.net/news> etc. page 17)

There are many other issues apart from those we have mentioned which give seafarers cause for anxiety – these are just a select few from seafarers of various ranks.

This might sound strange, but in many conversations, seafarers said that they don't spend a long time talking on the phone with their wives, because if they do, the problems start. Instead, they avoid mentioning problems and just try to suppress them. One captain added that whenever he asks his wife about the money he sent, she feels that he doesn't trust her. He said they often quarrel on the phone. For their part, the wives have to shoulder all of the responsibilities at home alone. One wife said:

I am the mother and father at the same time. I handle all of the responsibilities.

For many situations it is difficult to give the right kind of advice when it comes to dealing with our fears. However, the Bible encourages us to put our confidence in God's promises: Luke 12:22-26 "*Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"*" I truly hope that such biblical promises will give you strength in your day to day situations.

I met so many seafarers who confessed, that living with the promises of the Bible really helped them in their situation on board. Can I encourage you at this stage to get a Bible when you get to the next port? If there is no chance, please try to download the Bible. There are many Bible versions in many different languages, free to download, most of which can be set to read to you (This is especially helpful at the end of a long day when your eyes are tired) (see Appendix for example Apps).

6. What is the goal or purpose of my life?

Goals are something many people do not take the time to think about. They just live from one day to the next. They are mobilized by certain situations, circumstances or emotions. However, when people are faced with problems and forced to deal with them, then they sometimes start seeing their lives from a different perspective. They suddenly realize that without goals, they often end up in situations they would rather not be involved in at all. It is interesting to note that God wants us to have goals, and if we make His goals our goals too, it will be good for us. The New Testament says in Matthew 6:33 *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”* This is indeed one of the key challenges in life. God invites and challenges us to seek him, and to look first to Him for help and when making adjustments in our lives to put him first. He wants us to let him play the most important role in our lives. If we do this, then God will keep his promise: *”and all these things will be given to you as well”*...In other words, God knows our needs, he knows them even before we become aware of them, and he is more than happy to provide us with what we need – and even beyond that. Therefore, our goal should be: God first...Seek first his kingdom...Seek first God’s desires...How can we do that? The best way is to get a Bible and start reading it. It will tell you all about God’s desires. I have met many seafarers who wanted to know God’s desires, they wanted to live in a way pleasing God, and the result was that the blessings of God were obvious for all to see. What God promises, he will carry out. God cannot lie. God will never cheat us. He will always be true and faithful. Here is how Fritz¹⁶, a Filipino seafarer experienced how to have a goal and purpose in life:

Being the oldest of nine children in our family and the breadwinner, I faced a lot of hardships just to help my family. I didn’t even realize what my purpose in life was supposed to be. Sometimes I told myself that when the living standard of my family improves, I will be able to die, because I always thought that my only reason for living was to help my family out of extreme need. It didn’t make sense, but that is what I

¹⁶ Permission granted from the seafarers to print this article.

thought my life was all about: to enable my family to live better and then die. But it changed completely when I started to have faith in Christ. I realized that I was made for eternity. He changed me. I now value life so much because I know that God wanted me to experience life, love him and love other people. Because of my faith, I found my purpose in Him. He taught me how to live, and he always encouraged me in his word, the Bible. I trust Him to control my life. He also taught me to trust him more, in spite of the fear, pain and the worst situations. He made me the kind of person he wanted me to be. God has complete control of my life and he has a good plan for me, more than I ever dreamed of in my wildest dreams. He gives me everything that I need. He shows me the purpose for everything I have, even the smallest and most simple things. For anyone who doesn't have this kind of faith, I hope that you will open your heart to Christ. All you have to do is to accept him completely and surrender everything to him, and I am sure you will experience a better life, more than you ever expected.

Rick Warren puts it this way: "When you fully comprehend that there is more to life than just here and now, and you realize that life is just a preparation for eternity, you will begin to live differently. You will start living in the light of eternity, and that will color how you handle every relationship, task, and circumstance. Suddenly many activities, goals and even problems that seemed so important will appear trivial, petty, and unworthy of your attention. The closer you live to God, the smaller everything else appears."¹⁷

Yet, besides keeping our eyes fixed on God, it is necessary for us to focus our attention on practical everyday living. Having some sort of order and system enables us to identify and give a priority to those concerns and issues, which are more important. We often tend to fix our eyes on the things, which are not so important, and then suddenly, there's hardly any time left to take care of what needs to be done. So how do we know what our priorities should be? How do we make sure that the most important tasks are done first? How do we make sure that time doesn't run out in this already hectic world? It is certainly helpful to first sit down and think about the many areas in our lives that seem to be important. Maybe it would even help to make a list of everything that is important and after

¹⁷ Rick Warren, *The purpose driven life*, p. 37, Zondervan Publishing, USA.

that to note down what is extremely important. This helps us to identify the secondary things and leave them until after we have focused on the primary matters.

While talking to a Filipino officer on a small container ship, I asked him to think about his purpose in life. He answered:

Years ago I did not understand much about the purpose of life. My goal was to become wealthy and rich, to become a captain and to have a high position, to be well-known etc. But that changed when I got to know God. The secret of a life with God is mentioned in the Bible. Even if you have a good position on the ship, if you own a lot in this world, but you miss out on God, your life can be miserable. Now I can say that my goal, my purpose is to become more like JESUS.” The Bible challenges us on this point, in Matthew 16:26 *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*¹⁸

Being successful is important to many of us. We want to achieve certain goals in life. The only problem is that we often try to attain these goals by our own efforts. It leaves us feeling frustrated when things don't turn out as planned. I'd like you to take a look at Joshua, one of the most successful leaders of the Israelites, in the Old Testament. This is what God told him in Joshua 1:7-9 *“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

One of the most challenging and encouraging books I have read is “The purpose driven life” by Rick Warren. On page 37 you can read the following lines:¹⁹ “When you fully comprehend that there is more to life than just here and now, and you realize that life is just preparation for eternity, you will begin to live differently. You will start living in the light of eternity and that will color how you handle every relationship, task, and circumstance. Suddenly many activities, goals and even problems that seemed so

¹⁸ King James Bible.

¹⁹ The purpose driven life p. 37, Rick Warren, Zondervan Publishing, USA.

important will appear trivial, petty and unworthy of your attention. The closer you live to God, the smaller everything else appears. When you live in the light of eternity, your values change. You use your time and money more wisely. You place a higher premium on relationships and character instead of fame or wealth or achievements or even fun. Your priorities are reordered. Keeping up with trends, fashions, and popular values just doesn't matter as much anymore. Paul said, "I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done."

Many times, the whole question of having a purpose in life or having no purpose comes down to the question: Who do I want to serve? Do I want to serve myself, my ego, my ambitions, my hope to someday be a very important person? Maybe have a good title, earn good money, have a good reputation. Or do I ask God this question: What is your purpose for my life? God gives us the freedom to choose but we also need to be aware, that every decision we make in life will have consequences. Sometimes these consequences are positive, sometimes they are negative. God is able to give us everything that we need, even material possessions, but our heart should not cling to them, but rather seek to please God at all times. Psalms 37:4 describes it in this way: "*Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*"

7. Will there ever be an end to the temptations?

Many seafarers probably ask questions like these: How on earth will I ever overcome temptations? Why is it so hard to fight temptations? Will I ever be freed from temptations? Who can help me in my fight against temptations? You might have already given up worrying about the issue because you don't think you are able to stand up against temptations. Maybe you are frustrated. But is there really no solution? Whilst talking with a seafarer on this subject an idea occurred to me: why don't I write a book about the struggle against temptations? I did just that and the book is available. It is called "Help, how can I overcome temptations?"²⁰ After the book was published, a seafarer who read the book wrote me, saying,

Dear bro. Martin, Hello brother, I hope you are now well. (The last time I heard from you) you told me that you were sick and couldn't visit the ship but I prayed for your safety and good health...I want to tell you that recently we received information that the vessel I am on will be sold right before my contract is finished. We are not yet sure when this will happen. Anyway thank you for your prayers, and God knows I want to see my son soon, for I miss him very much...seeing him growing only by pictures posted on the internet always breaks my heart...the thought of me being there to teach him how to be a man and everything else. I sometimes feel depressed and want to talk or even go home right away. Anyway, I thank the Lord for giving me patience. Having a Bible really helps me cope with my loneliness, and also having my wife and friends like you, who I can always rely on. In the end, I have realized that my life is not so bad after all, because I have got people who care about me and who help me be closer to God and be a better person and Christian. Your book on temptation is really a big part of my everyday life on board along with the feelings I have, because in it you wrote about how and why I should put Jesus first in my everyday routine. When I read it, I feel like I am talking to you and you are giving me advice. I can relate to the stories in it. Now I give all of my thoughts and everything on my heart

²⁰ Help, how can I overcome temptations by Martin Otto is available in English and Taglish.

to Jesus. I hope that there will be another book like this to deepen a seaman's faith²¹ in God and answer questions while we are feeling lonely and need guidance. I am sure that you have already helped thousands of sailors through your book on temptation, which you have shown them how to be a Christian and live by faith and God's grace. When I get home, I am planning to visit brother Vic Atanacio. I hope it will be possible this time. I will also take my wife and my son along to meet him. Anyway, I will pray that you will always be in perfect shape to carry out your mission work and may God protect you always. God bless. JAY-R

The following is a letter from a wife of a seafarer. In it she explains how she tries to fight temptations.

Each person in this world has different struggles in his life. Everyone is unique. We are in different situations we live in different ways and we struggle in different ways.

Two persons are united in Christ to become one flesh, and nothing can separate them because God has united them. But circumstances can come between these couples. They feel they need to separate and that the one should leave the other one in order to have brighter future. The particular situation seems unique, and this presents possibilities, either to build up a relationship or to break up a relationship.

My husband is a seaman, and I as a seaman's wife, was once left at home for three years. Those were really difficult times during my life; I struggled, and many temptations came up.

I met different people, and it sometimes came to the point that some of those people showed their interest in me. And then I almost forget that I was already committed to my husband. At those times, I really want to give in to the temptation; maybe I was longing for the care and mostly the presence of my husband. God made a way. He didn't allow the temptation to gain the victory.

The word of God says that those who can be trusted with small things can be trusted in bigger things. Seaman's wives have a tendency to spend too much of the money they get from their husband, for different reasons, maybe to satisfy their material needs, or to have fun with friends, which they shouldn't do.

²¹ Faith at Sea, now available through the author of this book.

Making friends can have a great influence on one's life; wives without their husbands tend to make friends who might lead them away from what is right and some friends will convince the wife to commit adultery by telling them that it's just ok because their husband is also doing the same thing on-board.

There's always a way out. You may sometimes feel that a temptation is too overpowering for you to bear, but that's a lie from Satan. God has promised to never allow more than you can handle. He will never permit any temptation that you cannot overcome.

Defeating temptations also means running away from anything that gives you evil thoughts. But stay close to anything that makes you want to do right. 2.Tim. 2:22"

I received the following mail from a woman who works on a cruise ship. This is what she learned about temptations on board a ship.

Being away from your loved ones and living in a confined space where you spend your everyday life, can restrict a seafarer's healthy interpersonal relationships. One of the most common temptations of working on-board ships is INFIDELITY. It has been a common saying that if you work on ships, then you're likely to be involved in forbidden relationships. Most people who are "lonely" tend to channel their emotional resources such as romantic love, time, and attention to someone else – someone who is around, who can give them the attention and care that they crave, because they are away from their families. Infidelity is defined as an act of unfaithfulness to one's husband, wife, or lover, whether sexual or non-sexual in nature. On-board, it is defined as "companionship", or an "open relationship". It is even acceptable if both persons involved are married and have children. When they get home, they are back to their own families anyway, no strings attached. What constitutes an act of infidelity varies between and within cultures and depends also on the type of relationship that exists between people. There are two areas in a close relationship where infidelity mostly occurs: physical intimacy and emotional intimacy. Infidelity is not just about sex outside the relationship, but about trust, betrayal, lying and disloyalty. What makes infidelity so painful is the fact that it involves someone deliberately using deception to violate established expectations within a relationship – which is supposed to be bound by love and integrity.

Sadly, this can happen to anyone, Christian or non-Christian. This is where the Church On-board has come into play. During counseling sessions with those who have (in some way or the other) experienced this kind of destructive temptation, it has been identified that the common denominator is weakness and lack of faith. They have become emotionally weak and have failed to stand firm in what is right in God's eyes. Encouraging a person who is still engaged in this dilemma requires a long process of restoration. We first aim to bring the person's perspectives back to the basics, e.g. what are the things that matter most in his life, what are his purpose and goals. Then we lead them to understand the definition of genuine love, through Jesus. We do not condemn what they did; instead we explain that it is Satan who has deceived them to believe the wrong perspective about love. We explain to them that the only way to defeat deception is to know the truth – which is found in the Bible. Only the truth shall set them free! Once the person's perspectives are restored and the bondage is broken, then they can establish healthier relationship with their loved ones through constant communication.

They can always rely on the brethren for good advice too. Apart from our weekly praise and worship and Sunday service, we also have informal gatherings in the crew mess or ashore, just to build the camaraderie. We have practice sessions for the next week's line up of songs. We can't seem to wait for the next time that we will have fellowship! We basically establish real friendship. Anyone can seek help whether it is personal or work-related. If someone goes home for vacation, we send keepsakes like cards, letters or books to remind them that there's a family who is waiting for his/her return on-board. If time and location permit, we try to meet each other in our home countries – attend a common church and meet our families. Most members have commented that being in a group of Christians kept them focused and enabled them to resist temptation. But we tell them that it is Jesus in their hearts that led them to channel their love, resources and attention to what matters most in life – to know Jesus, live a life according to the Lord's plan, and lead more souls to Jesus.”

The temptation that looks so sweet but later becomes bitter

While visiting a cruise ship in Hamburg, a young Filipina came to me asking if she could sit with me. I agreed and she asked again, “Can I share something with you?” Sure, I said, no problem. Here is what Caroline²² said:

Around April this year, I joined the ship for the second time, and I was very confident that I would do my ministry as a Christian there. I thought I would show people that not all seafarers are the same, and I wanted to prove to myself that I was not one of them but rather that I could be a good Christian on a sinful ship. I was eager to show people my Jesus. I even confronted one of my colleagues, who was a Christian and who was having an affair: “Why are you doing such a thing”? he replied. “Don’t be so judgmental. It could happen to you as well. It could happen to anyone”. I just laughed and thought to myself, “That will never happen to me. Not to a child of God”.

I thought I was fine. I thought I was beyond that kind of sin because I could never imagine myself doing such a thing, and I was totally convinced that God wouldn’t allow it to happen to me. No! Never!

Not until Peter came along...

He was a nice, good-looking guy, a friend, a close friend, who I had met on the same ship a year earlier. Peter was nice to me, and even though he wasn’t a born-again Christian, he was humble and kind to others. He treated me a bit more special than anyone else on the ship – which I found normal – or was I just too naive to realize what was really going on?

I thought that it was a fine thing for a girl to be very close to a guy and for a guy to be very nice to a girl...it seemed so normal. (Or that was what the devil kept suggesting, and what I listened to.) My husband knew about Peter and he warned me not to get closer to him, but I didn’t take his warning seriously.

Once again, I convinced myself that I would show Peter who Jesus is. I even prayed for him and told him about Jesus. But in the back of my mind, I had a strange feeling, an unusual feeling, something I had never imagined before...There was something wrong – oh, no – I’m married, and I discovered that I was falling in love with Peter!

²² Name changed to protect the person’s identity.

Peter told me that he liked me, but he didn't expect anything in return. One evening, I broke down in tears, and I asked God, why do I have to feel this way about him? It broke my heart to realize that I was in love with Peter and at the same time I was already committed to someone else. My husband, Paul, also a seafarer, works on another ship. He is a good man, an obedient Christian, very patient and kind. How could he deserve to have an adulterous wife?

Yes, I committed adultery. I loved another man. I didn't heed my husband's warnings.

I even ignored my guilty conscience. I gave in to a little lie which began growing until I gave in to the devil by thinking, "It's not your fault; you're just following your heart. It's going to be ok; soon it will be just like eating peanuts – everyone is doing the same thing; it's normal on the ship. And how can it be so wrong, when it feels so right"?

I neglected my prayers at night. I neglected my devotions. My priorities began changing. I forgot who I was. I forgot who I belonged to.

Peter and I began an affair. He like me, I liked him. The feeling was mutual! We decided to keep it a secret, but rumors about us began spreading. I denied everything. I lied to my colleagues, to my friends, to my family, and above all, I lied to my husband. He who had always been so understanding and loving to me. I took advantage of his love and trust. I lied to my "better-half".

My heart just broke every time I realized that what I was doing was wrong. How could I do such a thing? I didn't even know who I was anymore. I cried to God for help. I told Him to do something so that I could escape from this sin. I remembered what one of my seafarer colleagues, a Christian, had once told me: Getting into sin with your whole self is easy, but getting out of it is difficult and leaves you broken.

He was right. Every night I cried. I cried out to God for help, but He didn't seem to answer my prayers. I felt lost. I didn't know what to do. When I was alone, I cried – no-one knew how I felt. I was confused and during the night I was so restless. I wanted to break up with Peter and I tried, but my heart kept telling me, "You love him". On the other hand, my mind kept saying, "It's wrong! He is not your husband"!

The days went by and Peter and I were so happy being in love. Although I knew I was trapped in the devil's scheme, I still continued to show Peter my affection.

Until one evening. It was an unforgettable evening. While I was busy sending Peter a text message, someone replied on his face-book account. It was his girlfriend May!

You can imagine the rest. To make a long story short, she found out that Peter and I were having an affair. She wrote that I was a hypocrite. That made me so sad! I couldn't blame her because she was right. I was a hypocrite. I didn't practice what I preached. I apologized to her. She replied that I just felt regret because she had found everything out. But, no, I was sorry because I knew I was wrong.

I couldn't stop crying. I felt so lost and in such despair. I had kept everything secret and that made me feel so alone. I couldn't tell my friends about it because I was afraid. I didn't know any other Christians on the ship. I was so depressed. The devil kept reminding me of my sin. It was a sin from the list of the Ten Commandments, which I had always been afraid of committing.

I cried out to God that night and asked for His forgiveness and help. The devil made me think that it was too late now, that my life was already ruined. I was going to have to face the consequences. The devil condemned me over and over again. There was no way out.

It was the most painful time of my life. I broke my husband's heart. I broke May's heart. Above all, I broke the heart of Jesus. I made my own life miserable. That broke my heart too. I had never imagined I could get into such trouble. But there I was, "one of them" now. I was broken and my spirit was crushed.

That evening I decided to tell my husband Paul about the affair. I also told May that I would confess everything to him. I knew that I would have to deal with this at some point, even though I didn't feel ready for it. To be honest, it was the scariest time of my life.

I was afraid that Paul would reject me. May asked me not to tell him anything until Peter's contract on the ship was over and he had disembarked from the ship. She was afraid that my husband would take revenge. However, I had already made up my mind. I decided to break the chains that had been holding me bound.

I knew this would not be easy for Paul even though it was the right thing to do. I told him what was going on. At first, I was a bit hesitant and told him only a part of the truth. Yet something inside me forced me to tell the whole truth. So, I did. I confessed everything. I decided to accept Paul's reaction, whatever it would be. I would simply accept the consequences. I would accept my husband's anger. I would accept May's anger. I would accept God's anger. Would God ever forgive me? Would my husband forgive me? Would Jesus love me less? Would my husband love me less?

Those were my questions. I was nothing but a sinner. Satan made me feel like I wouldn't be able to cope with it all. But not all of these thoughts were in line with the truth. I still had a sense of hope. I prayed that God would help my husband to see Jesus in his life because I couldn't see Jesus in my life.

After I told my husband the whole story, he began to cry. I had broken his heart. But then he said the sweetest thing that I had ever heard from him. He said that Jesus had forgiven him because he was also a sinner, so "Who am I not to forgive"? He also said, "I am not angry at you but at the devil inside you. It is not you who did those things but the devil. I forgive you with all my heart and I accept you just as you are. And I love you even more now".

Those are my husband's words. I felt so ashamed. My heart and my spirit were crushed. I couldn't forgive myself. How could I deserve such mercy? How could I deserve such forgiveness and love? I was able to see Jesus in Paul.

I couldn't stop crying. I poured out my heart to God but this time it was in gratitude. I was so thankful. And I asked God, why did He forgive me? And why did Paul love me after all that I had done?

It all left me puzzled and amazed. I asked God, "Why"? Where does that kind of love and forgiveness come from? Then God led me to open the Bible to Luke 15:1-7, to the parable of the lost sheep. I had been lost but now I was found. Jesus said that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

I was comforted by God's word, by His promise. By God's promise on the cross: He knew this would happen, so he paid for it in advance! Little by little I came back to life – I was breathing again, my heart began to beat, but it was for Him. I had been dead but now I was alive. It is no longer I who live but Jesus who lives in me. The old me is gone. The new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The first step in a new relationship had been taken, but how would I handle the situation with Peter?

Peter was a nice man; I could understand. Soon as he realized that May and Paul knew about our affair, he felt sorry about the mess he got involved in. He talked to Paul on the phone and apologized. He also asked me to forgive him, and said he was really sorry, that he almost ruined me and Paul's marriage because of what happened.

It was not easy to break up with Peter. I admit I really felt for him and it broke my heart, because it was the first time that I felt broken because

of a man. All my life I have never had a boyfriend except my husband, so that was the first time I understood how it feels to be broken-hearted, although it was different because Peter and I were breaking up, not because we fell out, but because we were both committed to someone else, and our relationship was unacceptable in man's and in God's eyes. So even if we really liked each other, I had to make a decision; Should I continue with him and ruin my marriage, or should I admit I was wrong and ask both God and Paul for forgiveness and face the consequences?

That very night I cried to God, I asked Him for forgiveness and strength. He gave me the strength to overcome my feelings. It really hurt but we (Peter and I) chose to end our affair. We talked one evening to finish what we had started, and it brook my heart. But I knew It would not do us any good, so we had to stop.

After several days had passed, I realized that Peter and I had been enslaved by sin and that Satan did not want me to open my eyes to see clearly that we were under his spell.

Now I am so thankful that God led me into His presence during those times of chaos in my life. His presence is indescribable.

I thank God for His saving grace, unfailing love and everlasting mercy.

By the grace of God, by the love of Jesus, by His blood, I was cleansed and now I am righteous – all because of what He has done. I thank Him and praise Him for wiping away my sins and forgetting them. I have made a firm decision to look ahead, not back. My husband always tells me that if the devil reminds me of my sins, I should point him to the cross. Everything has been paid for! One thing is for sure: I might fail Jesus again, but I am convinced that His love and mercy will endure forever. That is the truth I want to hold on to. That is the promise of the cross. There is no more condemnation in Him!

I have decided to only listen to Jesus and to believe in Him only. To only believe in what the Bible says. I can see clearly now. The devil deceived me. He said that I would never be forgiven. But Jesus said, "It is finished"! And if He said, "It is finished", then it is indeed finished! My sins are forgiven, forgotten, wiped away. Because of what He has done on the cross, I am free now. Praise, glory, honor and thanks belong only to Him! Thank you, Jesus, for everything! You freed me from all my sins!

Testifying in the name of Jesus.

Caroline*, a sinner, found guilty, now forgiven.

Jesus has been victorious again!

Amen.

Following this honest testimony from Caroline, you can read what her husband had to say when he found out what was happening to his wife:

God gave us the opportunity to work on a cruise ship, but unfortunately we were on different ships. To be honest it's really hard for me to be far away from my wife, but we accepted the challenges that God gave us. On my first contract, I didn't have any idea what to do, I had no idea what awaited us on the ships. So, I prayed to God that He would guide me, and I also prayed that He would give me fellowship on board.

God is faithful, during my first contract, there was Christian fellowship on board, and God gave me a ministry.

When I joined the ship on my first contract, I noticed that it was normal for people to have a boyfriend or girlfriend even if they were committed to someone else or even if they were married. Some of my colleagues asked me "Why don't you do what they are doing?" They told me that I could choose a girl just to have a partner on board. I replied, I am committed to someone, I am married, and I said that it is sin. They laughed at me and they said, even saints or people close to God are committing that kind of sin. And I said that will not happen to me because Jesus lives in me. They asked me where my wife was working, and I told them that she was working on another cruise ship. Then they wanted to know why I allowed my wife to work on board. They were worried that my wife would cheat on me and do what the people normally do on a ship.

I was confident that it wouldn't happen to me and to my wife because I knew that Jesus lived in us. So, we finished our first contract peacefully, and she didn't cheat on me, and I didn't cheat on her.

On our second contract, again it was hard for us to be far from each other, but we didn't have any choice, once again we accepted the challenges. I felt blessed because God gave me another ministry onboard, and my wife found a Christian fellowship also. However, it lasted only few weeks because most of the people went home. I always encouraged my wife, I shared whatever the topic we were discussing, and I always prayed for her.

My wife is very friendly, she told me that she had a friend, a nice and a good guy and she said that this guy was different from the other guys. That time I became worried about my wife. I told her to be careful with that guy. Of course, he would do nice things for her, but he surely had personal interests. Then in the middle of our second contract, my wife told me that there is a girl who got angry with her, the girlfriend of the

guy. It was because the lady had found out that her boyfriend was always sending sweet messages to my wife. My wife confessed it to me before the girl told me. Then the lady sent me a message. She was really angry with my wife, and she sent me the conversation between my wife and the guy, which I read. The problem of that conversation was that my wife allowed the guy to tell her that he loved her.

While reading the messages I began crying, my heart broke, and I was puzzled about why my wife was involved with this guy.

During that time my wife was in a difficult situation. I wanted to be with my wife, I wanted to hug her, I wanted to protect her from those who put her in that situation. But I couldn't do anything because I was miles away from her, so I cried out to the Lord. I lifted up everything to Jesus.

My wife and I talked about the matter and she said that she would keep her distance from that guy, and she would not spend time with him. I trusted my wife with all my heart. So, we finished our second contract.

My third contract was in my new company (MSC). Actually, I didn't want my wife to work again on board, because I was scared of what the guy would do to my wife, but my wife wanted to work again on board. She wanted to prove something, she wanted to show who Jesus is in her life, that's why I did not argue with her. So, I let her go and work again.

God always blessed me during this contract. He gave me a ministry again. And I really felt that God was doing something in my spirit, He lifted up my spirit and He prepared my heart for the unexpected.

I got the feeling that my wife had a problem because when I asked her one day, "If Jesus returns, will you be ready?" She didn't answer. Then I knew that something was wrong. I prayed and I lifted up everything to God.

In the fourth month of my contract I received a message from the girlfriend of that guy, a pleasant and calm message, saying she wanted to speak with me and clarify something. When I read her message, I already knew what was going on.

At that point I prayed, "Lord do not allow this thing to happen to us; yet I will still trust in you"

I just waited for my wife to tell me the truth. When my wife told me that she had fallen in love with that guy, and that they had a secret relationship, she told me that she had sinned against me and against God, and that she wanted to get free from the curse; she wanted to come free from that sin. My world went on hold for a moment...I cried, and I asked

God, "Why should this happen? Why did you allow this?" I cried and I cried... I cried out to God, and I asked for help...

I made up my mind. I held on to my faith. I loved my wife and I didn't want her to perish. I wanted her to be free from that curse. I decided to forgive her even if it hurt me. I decided to accept her even if it crushed my heart. That time I didn't care of what the world or people would say, I didn't care about my feelings. I just cared and I only thought about my wife, because I loved her so much. I forgave her just as Jesus forgave me. I am also a sinner, who am I not to forgive? I wanted to fulfil the commitment I gave my wife three years earlier: in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, in good times and in bad times. Till death do part us. And I believe God would not allow us to go through a situation that we couldn't handle. I believed that He would be with me always. I believed He could use the very worst situation, turn it upside down and create good and victorious outcome so that we would be able to learn lessons and come back to Him, so that He could still be glorified in the end.

I, Paul²³ testify that because of the love and grace of God, I forgave and accepted my wife, and without the help of God I cannot do anything.

After having talked to both the husband and wife, I asked them what led them to the point of giving in to temptation. This is what Caroline said:

Temptation is not something to take lightly onboard cruise ships. It has many faces. You are right when you say that we need good fellowship with other believers, and we should stand our ground like Joseph in the Old Testament. It seems impossible because temptations look uncontrollable here on board, but I believe nothing is impossible with Jesus. Some of the reasons why it is so hard to overcome temptations on board is that we know how to distinguish between right and wrong, but we are not serious about the consequences of our actions. Although we know that we are sinning, we are not aware that we are being selfish. We are both physically and spiritually weak. In the past, I thought about doing my ministry and turning away from temptations, but whenever I wanted to do it, I just did not know how to start. I was tired or sleepy, and I condemned myself because of what I had done. Many lies filled my mind. Whenever I wanted to read the Bible, I felt tired from work, I was lazy, and I became addicted to social media. My spirit was willing, but my flesh

²³ Name changed to protect the identity of the seafarer.

was weak. I lacked prayer and real fellowship with other believers. I would say it is dangerous not to pray regularly. I would also suggest talking regularly with the family at home. Give yourself enough sleep and be disciplined. Eat well and do not think too much. A real help is when other believers pray for you. All Glory belongs to Him!

As we can see from the above testimonies, the tricky thing is that Satan sows lies in people's minds. First of all, he tells people that one sin is not so bad, and besides everybody else does it. Satan makes sin seem sweet. Many people, when tempted by the opposite sex, don't resist the temptation but just give in. After they have had an intimate relationship with another man/woman they feel bad. Many have cried, and wondered: How could that happen to me? How can I find forgiveness? Many feel hurt and dirty. The next problem arises when the husband/wife at home finds out about the sexual affair. Huge problems start. The marriage is endangered and the peace they once had is gone. In the above-mentioned case, the young woman not only lost her peace and felt guilty. The girlfriend of the boy she was in contact with also threatened her. The girlfriend said if she did not leave the ship, she would let the family of her husband know about the sin, tell her family about it and even make it public among the whole fleet of cruise ships. "This would be a catastrophe", I was told. This woman was shocked and asked me for advice.

To sum up the situation we can say that Satan lied. He is called the Father of lies. He made sin so sweet, but he did not say anything about the consequences of the sin; how a person has to pay for the sin. In exchange for a short time of happiness, problems arise that will last for weeks, months and maybe even for years. Is it worth it? The Bible tells us to flee from temptation and to come to Jesus who understands us and who was also tempted like we were. (Hebrews 4:15 *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."*) Can I encourage you at this stage not to seek peace, joy and enjoyment in people, but rather to seek it in a relationship with Jesus Christ, because you will not be disappointed. On the contrary, your peace and joy will grow, and you will be satisfied by the love of Christ.

Neil T. Anderson speaks in his book “The bondage breaker” about the channels of temptations.²⁴ “According to the Bible there are only three channels through which Satan will entice you to act independently of God.

They are summarized in 1. John 2:15-17 “*Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also it's lusts, but the one who does the will of God abides forever.*”

The three channels of temptations are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The lust of the flesh preys on our physical appetites and their gratification in this world. The lust of the eyes appeals to self-interest and tests the Word of God. The pride of life relates to self-promotion and self-exaltation. Satan confronted both the first Adam and the last Adam through each of these three channels of temptation. The first Adam failed miserably, and we still suffer the results of this failure. But the last Adam – Jesus Christ – met Satan’s threefold temptation head-on and succeeded triumphantly. In Him we have the resources and the power to conquer every temptation which Satan throws at us.

In the book of John ch.7:38-39 we read: “*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*”

²⁴ Neil T. Anderson, the bondage breaker, p. 139, Harvest House Publishers, USA.

8. How can I be a good husband? How can I take care of my family?

I am sure that everyone wants to have a successful marriage and a blessed family life and thus wants to do his best to be a good husband and father. At least this is the wish when people get married and when they are so excited about their marriage partner. They are full of love and emotions. They promise each other heaven on earth. But soon reality sets in when the first problems in life come up. It even gets more difficult when people are separated from each other through their jobs. For seafarers especially it is very hard, because their job requires them to spend an average of nine months away from their loved ones at home. Consequently, the question will arise: How can I be a good husband? How can I be a good, loving partner? How can I make my marriage a success when I am thousands of miles away from home? What mistakes can be avoided in order to be a successful husband and father of my children? So, this is what a wife of a seafarer wrote:

Victoria Magayon – Wife of a Filipino Chief Engineer

Luckily for me, that I have a husband who became my best friend. We are very much open to each other, he can open my email, read my text messages and I can also open and read his. Open communication helps us support one another. Secondly, the most affected area in our marriage is the area of communication. Before, when the communication was not yet as fast and sophisticated as it is today, it was really very hard for us, because we waited for a long time for months to receive a letter. It was really a torture to think about what my husband might be doing, and where he was. But when the means of communication became sophisticated through cell phones and satellite phones and ship to shore radios, our relationship became stronger, because we could then decide together about plans and problems. This was different during the times when there was no proper communication. I had to make decisions on my own concerning whatever problem arose in my family. Now, due to good technology, such problems are fewer.

One problem, however, is the ability to communicate, often because the husband and wife simply do not know how to communicate with each other. When I see seafarers phoning their wives, I often notice that the phone call only lasts a few minutes. Obviously, the seafarer doesn't know how to communicate, or he even is afraid of some of the tough questions his wife might want to ask. Therefore, he prefers to keep the phone call short.

One way of making the communication more fruitful is to read a book together and exchange views and experiences over the phone. At this point I can recommend Gary Chapman's book, *The Five Languages of Apology* to all seafarers and their wives. If both read the same book, it will most likely help them to learn from each other. But let us pause here for a moment. What is communication really? I can imagine that people have different views about communicating with their spouses. I am convinced that we all have to learn how to communicate. It isn't easy, and it doesn't come automatically. Peter Tan-Chi, author of the book "Motivate" says the following:²⁵ "The principle of open communication is 'listen first!' Learn to listen, listen, and listen, without reacting. Listening is a habit that needs to be intentionally developed. Therefore: Listen first to understand before speaking to be understood. Listen not only to the spoken words, but also watch for the nonverbal or unspoken words to understand the emotions and the heart of our children." That also applies to communication with your wife, your friends, etc.

Another secret of building a strong relationship with your wife/husband is to follow the advice of Jack Miller²⁶ "I worked out a principle: I should affirm or praise her ninety-nine times before I criticized her once. Of course, I never did any of this perfectly, but my more frequent affirmations gave her a new security in our relationship. It enabled us to begin a slow move from defensive avoidance of painful differences, marred by occasional destructive conflicts, into a period of constructive conflict."

In addition to the relationship between a husband and a wife, is the question, how do you live out family when you are separated because of

²⁵ Peter and Deonna Tan-Chi, *Motivate*, 8 secrets of successful parenting, p. 30, OMF Literature, Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, Philippines.

²⁶ Rose Marie Miller, *From Fear to freedom*, p. 2 (foreword), Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, U.S.A.

your job? How can family become a priority? And what is meant by ‘A Christian home’? Dr. Alban Douglas defines a Christian home in his book “God’s answers to Man’s questions” in this way:²⁷ “The Christian home is the backbone of the nation, the salt of civilization.

- A Christian home is an institution where parents are bound together by Christian love.
- A Christian home is a place where members of the family enjoy rest, privacy, a sense of security, and learn to work, play, pray and plan together
- A Christian home is one in which the members learn to regard one another as having equal rights, where loyalty, honesty and co-operation are practiced and learned by each member of the family team.
- A Christian home is one that radiates Christ, welcomes strangers, and dispenses hospitality without measure.”

In the book “Family life²⁸” by the Global leadership center, we read the following which should really help us to put more importance on the family or Christian home²⁹.

- 14 million Filipinos are solo parents.
- 1 out of 3 youths have already engaged in premarital sex.
- 1 out of 10 teenagers have become mothers.

Therefore, the question arises: What are the attacks on the family in the 21st century, especially in the Philippines?

- Single parent homes
- Divorce or annulment
- Wrong values
- Live-in or cohabitation

²⁷ Dr. Alban Douglas, God’s answers to Man’s questions, p. 209, Cause & Effect Ministries, Columbia S.C., U.S.A.

²⁸ Family life, p. 9 Global leadership center, CCF Pasig City, Metro Manila.

²⁹ This is from the Philippine Statistics Authority as presented by GMA network.

- Premarital sex and teenage pregnancy
- Gender confusion and same-sex marriages
- Addiction to internet, games
- Pornography
- Substance abuse
- Media content (permeated with sex, violence and storylines that go against healthy, godly marriage and family values)

Benjamin Disraeli said: “No success in public life can compensate for failure in the home.”

Prayer that supports the bond of marriage

One of the seafarers I have known for many years is Melchor Valerio. He works on a cruise ship and has allowed me to send his message to you. This is what he is doing to be a good husband even though separated from his family for nine months at a time:

I always make sure that I can talk to my wife and family every time we have a signal and I am glad that the Lord continually gives me courage and strength. There are times when the enemy tries to remind me of negative thoughts, but I try to focus on God's perfect love. The Bible says, “*There is no fear in love for perfect love cast out fear*” (1. John 4:18) My wife and I also try to be open with each other. I believe these are the small things that we often ignore which can lead to huge problems in the future. And we have even tried to talk more during these past few weeks. We have also started to pray our covenant prayer with each other every day. Every day when it is 8:00 pm in the Philippines, we make sure to have a short prayer for each other at the same time. It is 2:00 pm here on the ship but I just ask my supervisor for a short break which I then use for our covenant prayer. My wife also encourages our two sons to participate. I believe it is only through maintaining a close relationship to Jesus that we can manage to build a strong relationship to our family.

9. What kind of legacy can I leave for my children?

Ronaldo, a Filipino seafarer says:

My life is so influenced by my work at sea. I was convinced that working on a ship was necessary because I wanted to give my children a better future. That included a good education and a life that they can enjoy, so that they can live free from the fear of poverty. I just wanted the best for my children. I have already worked for many years on foreign ships, and I plan to retire when I feel that my children are in a position to support themselves without any problems. However, since I usually see my children only two or three months a year, the question arises, what kind of legacy can I leave for my children? Someday I will no longer be living. I want them to have good memories of me. I want my children to be proud of me, and if they talk about me, I want them to remember things they have learned from me and things they are proud of. I want them to remember the beautiful times in our home when we enjoyed each other, when we laughed together, and when we cried together. Anyway, the question of legacy only arose because one of my seafaring colleagues unexpectedly died. For my friend who is dead, it is now too late to make a good provision for the future of his children. But since I am still alive, I want to care and find a good answer to that question.

Another seafarer, when asked about his legacy to his children, said:

What I have left for them is the possibility to get a good education so that they were able to finish their studies. I do not have a piece of land, and neither do I have a business to pass on to them, but I have made it possible for them to go to school. They have been able finish their studies and become professionals. They have jobs and can support themselves. I have also trained them in the Christian faith. This is all I could do for them.

Some seafarers seem to spend their money for things that are of very little value. They buy cars, jewelry and other items that are not necessarily bad. However, these things would not be of help if the children were in need. It is also important to know the difference between investing to make money

grow and spending on things that lose their value over time. Still others also think about an emergency fund that can be created for their children. Children would benefit from such an emergency fund and it could be used in many positive ways.

Cipriano Paragas, Chief Engineer and PMMA³⁰ graduate says the following:³¹

What do I leave as a legacy to my children – being a seafarer and away from home?

First and foremost, are MATERIAL THINGS (an inheritance), as it is the desire and main reason why most Filipino seafarers leave their families in order to earn a living. It is lucrative at that, compared to the earnings we could have if we worked on land, at home in the Philippines.

Secondly, along with the material things, is the education that I can provide or have provided, considering the fact that the degrees my children are working towards or have received, enable them to enter into the upper echelons in the academic fields. (Having stated this, when I think about it, I could not imagine how for example, Sahra, our eldest daughter, could have gone to medical school, or how the rest of our children could have gone to prestigious universities in Manila, if I were working on land in the Philippines.)

Above all, as a Christian, A GOOD NAME is what I want to leave as a legacy to my children/family. In line with that, I am doing my best to be known as a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ and profess my faith in my daily life, at sea or on land. On board, I share God's love and his word to my shipmates while doing my best to accomplish the jobs within my area of responsibility. I am striving to be the "life", the motivator, encourager, spiritual adviser of my colleagues. On land I always seize the opportunity to share my faith, God's love and his word to other people.

In the future, I want people who have worked with me or lived with me, to tell my children: "Oh, your daddy was a godly man. He was also kind and generous to other people. He was not selfish in sharing his knowledge, and what he had. He can be trusted and depended upon for any given task..." I want my children to hear from other people that I am a good Christian, a good person.

³⁰ Philippine Merchant Marine Academy.

³¹ Permission granted to quote his writings.

But is that really all a person can do? Is there nothing more that should be done? Peter Tan-chi, author of the book “Motivate” said the following about leaving a legacy: “We will all leave a legacy. But what kind of legacy will we leave behind? What will we pass on to our children, and our grandchildren? Will it be just material possessions such as money, properties, business, or will it be something more lasting? Will it pass the test of time? Will it be temporal, or eternal? Children are wondrous gifts from God. He has entrusted them to us. And he holds us accountable for how we raise them and the legacy we leave behind. Whatever we leave as our legacy will have eternal consequences³²

After all, the question must be asked: What is the goal of parenting? In Psalms 78:5-7 we read the following: He decreed statutes for Jacob, and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. God’s plan for us is to pass on a godly heritage. Do you notice the sequence? The secret of obedience is to know and trust God. The Bible states very clearly that you should put your confidence in God. If you don’t teach your children about the realities of problems and trials, they will think God does not love them when they experience these. Our prayer should be that our children will teach their children, and our children’s children will also teach theirs so that this godly legacy will continue.

You cannot change your ancestors but you can influence your descendants.

³² Motivate! 8 secrets of successful parenting by Peter and Deonna Tan-chi, p. 1, OMF Literature, Metro Manila.

10. Will I ever have enough time for my children?

“For the last 23 years I have been working on a ship”, says Robert³³, a Filipino engineer.

I hope to retire soon because I want to see my children. It is not enough to see them via Skype, I want to see them face-to-face. I want to talk to them and enjoy them.

He continued:

What good does it do if I send them money, buy them houses, enable them to attend the best schools, but have no time to be with them and enjoy their fellowship?

This is just one out of thousands of reactions from seafarers when asked about their children and the amount of time they spend with them. Children are so very important for each seafarer. They are so precious. After all, children are the future of the family for the seafarer. What’s more, a seafarer is proud of his children. He just loves his family and that includes his children. He would do anything for their well-being. But how can he cope with not having enough time at home to take care of his loved ones? Actually, the question of having enough time for the children weighs heavily on the minds of the seafarers. Logically speaking, he would agree that in order to properly raise children one needs to be more than two or three months a year at home. But how can he manage that? Should he leave the ship, his source of income? Of course not. Is there a satisfactory answer to put his mind to rest? Or should he make some sort of compromise, which will suit everyone? Maybe he could change the company or arrange to do training courses at another time so that he has more time with his family. The problem is that we too often hide behind the myth that quality time is more important than quantity time. But is that really true? The fact is that

³³ Name changed to protect the identity of the seafarer.

our children won't be around forever. Peter Tan-chi³⁴ says: "We must realize that the urgent will always be part of our lives, but our children won't always be there! Most people will take time for their priorities. If time with your children is your priority, you will find the time to spend with them. And it is not enough to just be there; you need to be fully "present" and available for them. Give them your full attention. Make the most of the time you do have with them. When they want to talk or play, drop what you are doing and grab the moment. The more time you spend with your children, the more you will be able to influence and motivate them." At this point you might say: "Wait a moment, I don't have so much time because my job requires me to be away for nine months a year. On top of that I also have to do important training courses and seminars when I'm back home." That might be true, but nowadays, most seafarers are able to have regular contact with their family via mobile phones. Can I encourage you to spend more time on the phone with your children? Maybe you will have to learn what it means to communicate effectively with your children. Maybe you have never spoken for more than 10 minutes on the phone with them. Seafarers often make excuses when asked about the time they set aside for communicating with their families. They say they don't have much time. And then they seem to spend a lot of time watching movies (on the ship), either on TV or on their smart phones. If you watched fewer movies and made an effort to really communicate with your family, especially with your children, you would quickly notice an improvement in your relationship with them. Bertram Lim writes the following in his book "Practical Christian Living": "Our children feel our love and concern when we take time to be with them. We should be sensitive to their needs, listen to their questions and arguments, soothe their heartaches, and empathize with them as they go through life. Let them feel they have someone to guide them, someone who understands them and has their best interest in mind". The problem is that we cannot recover wasted time. Therefore, we have to make up our minds to ask ourselves tough questions: How can I best spend my time with my children? What else can I do to make my children feel like I am devoting my time to support them, teach them, love them and guide them? I can imagine that you have no clear answer or plan.

³⁴ Motivate! 8 secrets of successful parenting by Peter and Deonna Tan-chi, p. 49, OMF Literature, Metro Manila.

If that is the case, can I encourage you to pray and say: Jesus, you know that I am often away from my family due to my job on a ship. Please help me to find ways of showing my children that I really care for them. Please help me to set the right priorities with my time and please show me where I need to change. Thank you, Jesus! I trust that you will help me. Amen.”³⁵

From a Filipino Chief Engineer, I received the following email telling us about his experience:

Positive side

Well, I would like to recall those happy days and hours when I think about being back for vacation and spend time with my two daughters with many gifts and plenty of money. You will know how I feel. You miss them for days, months or sometimes years! This is the time that you spend with them, to bring them to the malls, movies and beaches, because you have money to spend. With these kinds of feelings, you want to cover up your absences. That’s why you have no time to argue. Instead, you listen to them and feel happy with them during your vacations. I will spend those times with joy. Happy quality time!

Negative side

Will I ever have time? I have missed their days of growing up, I miss their Birthdays, I miss their special occasions when I should be home. I should have made them happy during their childhood days. If I had taken those chances before I would have not stayed long in my seafarer’s life or should have arranged a balanced life between work and family life. I should have taught them the value of family time...binding together and praying together, a whole happy family – not a broken family as now.

One captain I met in Hamburg on a container ship told me, that he works only four months per year on a ship. He rather would be home with his family then earning more money. So maybe that can be a solution at least for those who have good paid jobs like the captain, chief engineer, first engineer or chief officer.

³⁵ Bertram Lim, Practical Christian Living, OMF Literature, Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, Philippines.

A second officer from a cruise ship and a captain from a container ship wrote about their experience in taking time with the children at home. Here is what they said:

The obvious disadvantage to the seafarer over someone working in a land-based job is the fact that the seafarer has to leave home to work for a lengthy period and leave their family and children behind. As contract lengths vary from two weeks up to a maximum of ten months, those with the longer contracts are obviously at the greatest disadvantage.

But for some, despite the lengthy times away from home, once back home, there is the possibility of spending maximum time with the family and children as no other job can allow. When my children were much younger, from birth as they grew into their early years, I worked much shorter contracts, initially working six weeks on and six weeks off rotations, then four weeks on and four weeks off.

It was amazing to see the difference in growth of the children from leaving home until returning six weeks later. It was always a struggle for them re-adjusting to my return and settling back and enjoying having me around. It was much better when I returned after four weeks compared to six. I simply cannot imagine what disruption a seafarer having to complete a long contract may have to face in their relationships with their children.

Another thing I noticed was in the teen years. During this time, I was spending three months away onboard ship and two months at home. With my son in particular, emotions at home and at school seemed to deteriorate whilst I was away at work. Our relationship would be at its worst immediately I arrived back home but would gradually improve and be at its best just before I returned to work. Then I would leave and return to experience the same problem over and over again.

In the later years until the present, working on cruise ships, there was an added bonus. Although not as much as we may have liked, but I have had the privilege of having my whole family onboard ship with me on two separate occasions for up to two weeks. These were very special times indeed with the whole family onboard, it was a real blessing to be able to see them whilst at work. The children certainly enjoyed their time onboard, and they could boast of their father being an officer to the other children onboard.

The way I see it, there are advantages and disadvantages in every situation. So also with being a seafarer. But of course, my situation may be better than some other seafarers. In my opinion the shorter contracts

are preferred to the longer ones for the benefit of family life and relationships with our children. For this reason, time at home for the seafarer can be a blessing if only it is dedicated to spending maximum time with the family.

I am truly grateful to God for the life and profession He has given me. I do not feel disadvantaged in any way.

Hamish Boham – 2. Officer on a cruise ship

One of the most challenging times in a person's life is probably when he or she is separated from his or her beloved family. For those who are uncertain when and how they will see their family again, the terrifying effect of separation could be heartbreaking or possibly bring about disillusionment. However, there can be a positive aspect to being separated from a person's family. It could be a patriotic duty for the country, like soldiers. Or the high calling for the service of God our Lord to bring the Gospel to those lost souls in remote places. Or taking into consideration the opportunity of getting a better job away from home in exchange for a good support to family growing needs.

For the past four decades I have accumulated so many memories of the separated-reunited cycle with my family. My job as a Seafarer prompted me to go away, leaving behind my family and coming back to them after my tour of duty. From the very first day of my career to the present time of my profession I have experienced such situations: the loneliness of separation and the happiness of being together.

On my first day working on board the ship trading overseas, I had mixed emotions. For the first time, I am away from my parents and my siblings. I was caught up in a dilemma. But the excitement to fulfill my childhood dream of becoming a professional seafarer prevailed.

When I got married and blessed with a lovely daughter, the excitement of being together with the family became so intense. Over time, I realized I missed a great deal of time in the growing up of my daughter, our only one. I remember so vividly during her adolescent years when after our bonding time at home she told me: "Dad, why don't you stay home and find a job locally for good?" Her question really cut my heart deeply and lingered in my senses for a while. But I still have to keep doing the work I have trained for, for the sake of providing support for her studies and the daily needs of the family.

Years have passed and I became accustomed with life being with my family for a while and away most of the time, mingling with new ship-mates in every work assignment. The tough and dynamic work on board

ships has strengthened my physical and intellectual outlook. But the emotional aspect is so fragile that it affects the inner self when you face problems and remember your family back home – thinking when this cycle will be going to end. I realized it is not always the physical outlook that gives strength to a person, especially when you are away from your loved ones. It is the inner self, the unseen dimension of a living person, his soul and spirit that cheers him up, lift him up with gladness despite any circumstance that comes around. The most promising and everlasting inward peace and joy we can get is unseen. It is not the material possessions we gain, nor the highest academics we achieve, rather It is living in full dependance on the will of God that matters most. 2Corinthians 4:18 says, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

With all those challenges, trials and gained knowledge I have gone through, I am so thankful to God for giving me insight that sees through difficulties. Success in my profession is not the most I have. It is my living relationship with the Lord Jesus that gives me inner peace that no success in this world can give. When I reflect on Proverbs 3:5,6, I realized that It is through him that I receive the daily strength inside and out that is needed to accomplish daily undertakings. His Word becomes the lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Psalm 119:105). And that I became aware that without Jesus I can do nothing (John 15:5). Much more, I am so thankful to God that he did the same for my wife and our daughter. The distance is no longer an issue. But through fervent prayers we are joined together worshipping and serving our Lord. And with the marvelous advancement of internet technology, we are able to talk and see each other thru cell phones even when the ship is in the middle of the ocean. The boring process of getting words from your family becomes a thing of the past. At the end of each day the excitement of connecting with your love ones thru internet becomes the norm on board ships. It even becomes a tool for sharing the Word of God to others.

As the Lord Jesus becomes the centerpiece in our family life, he enables us to share the spiritual blessings with others. On my part, he led me to share the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ with my shipmates. He provided us time to worship him together, singing hymns and studying his Word in the Bible every Sunday at sea or sometimes in port. Our fellowship draws us closer to each other, and to the Lord – and gives understanding to those who never read a Bible in their lifetime. He also led us to meet faithful brethren in the ports who give us prayer and spiritual support to carry along in our voyage.

Working on a ship is not easy. It requires so many adjustments for yourself and your family. When you start leaving home for a distant work, you will begin a long journey spending time without your family. You need a good amount of *trust*, a good measure of confidence to pass the *test* of life and should know that it is only a *temporary assignment*. On top of it all, faith in God, knowing that he has a good purpose in every circumstance of our life (Romans 8:28). Better equipped with the Word of God, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, time away from home becomes time with the Lord in a “mission field”. When you get busy with your job that the purpose God has entrusted to you to do, time goes fast and you will hardly notice it’s the end of your temporary assignment and back to the fold of your beloved family.

May the grace of God, the peace from our Lord Jesus and the comfort of the Holy Spirit be upon us all, now and forever.

Amen.

Captain Noel Dagaman

11. What do my children think about me?

This is really one of the most important questions for many seafarers. As a father or mother, a seafarer is always concerned about his or her children and what they think about their parents and how they perceive their education and upbringing. Seafarers really want to find out if they have been too strict, perhaps demanding too much discipline. They want to know if their children really feel loved and cared for, especially since they are separated so long due to the nature of their job. They long to know what their children think is lacking in their upbringing and education. What are the wishes and desires of the children that the seafarers cannot fulfill? What could they as parents have done better, or what can they change to do better in the future? Peter Tan-chi says: Seeing their parents functioning as a team gives the children a sense of security.

This is what Zarah Nicole Dagaman, daughter of Captain Noel Dagaman, said about the time she spent home mostly separated from her father.³⁶

Having a dad that worked overseas definitely had its pros and cons. For most of my childhood he was on board a ship thousands of miles away and we couldn't be with him for six months, sometimes even longer. When I was younger, I found it difficult to understand why my dad had to leave for such long periods of time, and I remember crying every time he did. I would get so sad when he left and growing up in the pre-wifi era made communication more difficult. We didn't have the luxury of instant messaging or video calls back then; all we had was the telephone. And usually calls could only be made by my dad when he was docked at a port, and that would mean between a week and over a month, depending on how far he was going. But despite that, nothing beats the happiness, love, relief and gratefulness that you feel when you finally get to see him again. The time and distance that we spend apart makes the moments that we do get to spend together that much more special. It makes you closer and forges a deeper connection with each other that helps you appreciate the little things that most people take for granted. Things like having a meal together or going on trips as a family or even just

³⁶ Permission granted to print this article.

watching TV at home makes you feel so thankful that you have this moment to share. As an adult, I now understand why my dad had to leave; it wasn't because he wanted to go, it was because he wanted to provide for his family. And I have so much respect for him because of that, because life at sea isn't easy; you're far from your loved ones, it's hard work, it can get stressful and things can happen that are out of your control, but he still decided to do it because he knew it would give my mom and me a good life. I thank the Lord every day because of that; He blessed me with a God-fearing, caring, loving, hilarious and hard-working dad. And I am eternally grateful for him and to him, because I wouldn't be who I am today without him.

Another child of a seafarer is Keana, the daughter of Capt. Kennette Clavel. This is what she experienced when her dad was away from home:³⁷

Whenever my dad was at sea, a feeling of incompleteness filled me. We might have had everything we needed in our lives, but I still felt like something was missing, and that was the presence of my dad.

I often wondered how he was doing and as I continued think about him, I found myself worrying about his health as well as safety, since we his family were far away and didn't always have the latest news about his well-being. However, God always reminded me that I shouldn't worry about anything, because God was in control. That did not mean that I didn't text message him and ask about how he was doing.

I usually wrote to my dad every night and asked about his situation. He then replied immediately that by God's grace he was well.

There are many positive and negative effects of being away from my father. The main negative one was that I would worry about his situation, which basically meant I wasn't trusting God. However, the good thing about his being away was that I found myself praying more often than I usually did. As a result, it drove me closer to God. I would read the Bible and learn that I do not need to worry, because wherever my dad was, God was also there. God would never leave him or forsake him. His being away really brought me into a closer relationship with God.

One of the children wrote the following impressions to our secretary in Manila. This is how she always felt when her father was away:

³⁷ Permission granted to print this article.

Whenever my dad needed to go abroad to work, I was always confused as a child. Why does he have to go? Why can't he just stay with us and work here? Why can't I have both my parents waiting for me at home while I go to school? I have always asked myself these questions. However, since I have grown older, I have come to realize that these are the sacrifices my father chose to make in order to give us a comfortable life and provide for our needs. I have always experienced the advantages and privileges of studying at the university, having received more than I needed and sometimes being given what I wanted. However, I then realized that the lifestyle my family has could still not fill the emptiness and longing for a father. Besides these struggles, having a father working abroad also has its own blessings. Today I can really say that by God's grace we were able to sustain and cope with the situation and still bond and spend time together despite the fact that we lived so far from each other.

In the book "Seafarers, a strategic missionary vision", some of the children of seafarers describe other aspects and realistic feelings³⁸ "The memories of their father's absence during their childhood affects the children long afterwards. They particularly recollect the memories attached to special days, such as birthdays, Christmas day, degree ceremonies and other personal achievements. This is what one girl said:

It's basically on those special days, such as when you achieve something, and then you really want to share your achievement with your family. But then you know there is one member of your family who can't attend, who can't share your happiness. It's just that during those times you feel you need your father the most. It's those times that he is away.

Without an exception, all the children say that having their father at home makes them feel more secure and the family more complete. During a typical seafarer's contract of six to nine months, great physical and emotional changes take place in a young child's life, and seafarers' children frequently express concerns about their father's lack of recognition of these changes. One teenage girl said:

³⁸ Seafarers, a strategic missionary vision, p. 11+13, Martin Otto, Piquant Editions Ltd, Carlisle, England.

When our fathers come home, they expect us to still be the little kids they left behind. Things change, but they don't notice the changes because it is fixed in their minds that we are still the young ones they loved before. Sometimes misunderstandings occur because our fathers are not at home with us for a whole year. They cannot understand that when they are away, we change. They want us to be what we were before, and they cannot always accept the fact that we have become what we now are.

Seafarers are rightly proud of what they have achieved for their children. However, as some of the comments from their children suggest, there are certain problems that their children encounter due to the lengthy absences of their fathers. The aim of this section is not to paint a pessimistic picture of the seafarers' family lives, but to give a voice to their children in order to aid the search for a solution to their problems. Perhaps the first step in that direction comes from the children themselves:

My dad spends a lot of time away from us because of his job, so communication really matters. If we communicated better, the problems would be talked through. By communicating we could understand why we have these kinds of problems. That way, it would not be hard for me and my dad to understand each other.

The seafarers' absence can also create problems for their wives. As one seafarer's wife said:

During his vacation, he spent every day, except Sunday, on training courses and seminars. And if I may say so, he has not spent the time with us, his family. Although I know that all these training days and seminars are requirements for his position, I don't feel it is fair that he goes on board for six months and then has his training here for three months. We will survive, though, because we have faith and hope that God will end all our longing and hardships and one day we will live together as a family.

The problem that seafarers face is that they are hardly home and that their relationship to their children would be much better if they could spend more time at home. They try to establish good relationships with the kids through the Internet, Skype, telephone, messenger etc. However, it remains a very difficult task.

Another question that needs to be asked is: What does God think and plan for my relationship with my children? In the New Testament we can find some challenging and encouraging words in Ephesians 6:1-4 “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*”² “*Honor your father and mother*”—*which is the first commandment with a promise*³ “*so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*”⁴ *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*”

Below you will find some interviews with children of seafarers in Manila.

Jacob – Eldest son (age: 8)

Question: Do you know what your father does and where he works?

Answer: No.

Question: Do you have memories about the time you spent with your dad while he was here on vacation while you were little?

Answer: Playing (that’s the only answer he gave).

Question: Do you miss dad when he goes on board to work?

Answer: No.

Question: Do you like it when dad is home?

Answer: I don’t know.

Note: He’s indifferent, didn’t have any good memory of his dad except playing with him.

Hannah – Middle child, a daughter (age: 7)

Question: Do you know what your father does and where he works?

Answer: Yes, on a ship.

Question: How do you feel when it’s time for dad to leave for work?

Answer: It’s painful because we will be separated again, especially that mommy will be sad, and I know she will miss daddy. I saw her cry when we accompanied dad to the airport.

Question: What do you do when dad is on the ship?

Answer: I am happy that I get to talk to him through the video call and see him. Sometimes I don't talk to him because my studies are more important than him.

Question: Are you happy that daddy is working away from home?

Answer: Yes, because we can pay tuition fees and buy toys.

Question: Are you happy when dad comes home from work?

Answer: Yes, because he is the only one who can calm my brothers down when they fight. I pity mom because it's difficult for her to make them be quiet; she sometimes loses her voice.

Question: What do you miss the most about dad when he is away?

Answer: When he makes us happy and puts us to bed.

Caleb-Youngest son (age: 5)

Question: Do you know what your daddy does?

Answer: No.

Question: What do you miss the most when dad is away because of work?

Answer: Playing with him.

Question: What do you like most about dad?

Answer: Playing.

Question: Does he scold you when you do a terrible thing?

Answer: No, only mom does, mom teaches me, and dad plays with me.

Question: How do you feel when dad leaves for work again?

Answer: I'm happy because we will have money to buy toys, and mommy will be happy too.

12. What is necessary to be a good father?

Mario, a bosun, whom I have known for the last twenty years, said the following:

It is very difficult to be a good father when I am away from my three children. I miss our happiness together and enjoying the life of a father. I cannot accompany them to school, help them with their assignments and enjoy their hugs and kisses.

A seafarer certainly misses far more than that, but the question of how to be a good father remains for these men when they set sail for such a long time. Working on a cruise ship sometimes can be much harder than working on a cargo ship simply because there is more for the seafarers to do. Many work 12 hours daily. This is what Kenneth Roquios says:

As a father it's not easy to raise your children especially when you are far away from them, but one thing I should be thankful for is that I know Jesus in my heart. That is one of the secrets of being a good father. To have an intimate relationship with Jesus is the best way to lead your children, especially when they are growing up. I've been working on a cruise ship for the last 20 years, and my kids are grown up, but I haven't spent much time with them. The reason for this is simply my long contracts of nine months away from home and only two months of vacation during which I can see my children.

I cannot say with a 100% certainty that I am a good father, but God knows my heart and knows that I have tried to be a good father to them. I always relied on the Bible to give me wisdom and understanding on how to teach and guide them so that they would not depart from the right path.

The Bible says in Ephesian 6:4, "And you fathers provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up to the nurture and admonition of the Lord". This verse is very important to me and it helps me a lot when it comes to disciplining and training my children.

Communication is also one of the most helpful things in winning them: Not just to be a father but a friend. We should always listen to them and ask them if they have any problems or even any concerns in order to win them over and know what is in their hearts. I also remind

them to spend time reading the word of God and to participate in a church so that they can grow spiritually.

There was a story regarding a young kid, who made a scratch on his father's expensive luxury car. The father worked hard to earn a lot of money so he could buy an expensive car. But the unexpected happened. The young boy, who was only 5 years old, destroyed his father's car which had been in a good shape. The father didn't notice that he couldn't control his temper, and he took a wrench, put it on his son's finger on the table and hammered until the finger was totally damaged. He then took his son to the hospital. While they were there, the child asked him "Father will my finger be healed again? The father was very sad because he could not tell his son that this his finger would not be healed. The father left the room and went to the car and discovered the handwriting of the young boy (on the car?): "I LOVE YOU VERY MUCH DADDY". The Father was very sorry for what he did.

Sometimes different situations occur. Our priority in life is focused on material things, we have earned a lot of money, we invest in the future of our children, but we forget that our children long for LOVE and ATTENTION. We give them what they want, but sometimes we don't have enough time to talk to them. Even though we are far away from them, let us reach out to them through communication, let us get to know them and help them before it's too late, My friend, start now and give them the attention they need, build a strong relationship with them, and be an example to them as a good father who has put his faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. To God be all the glory! I hope that many seafarers will think about these things and reach out their kids and families with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Truly yours,

Mr. KENNETH NOVEJA-ROQUIOS

Bedroom Steward, Queen Elizabeth Cruise Ship

This is what Captain Kennette C. Clavel³⁹ says about his role as a father:

The father is consistently described in the Bible as being a leader. I believe, as the Bible says, that the role of the father of a family is very important. He is the very foundation of its well-being. A family may either stand strong or fall apart and it depends on how the father leads.

³⁹ Permission granted to print this article here.

The influence outside the home plays a factor in corrupting the attitude and character of the children. It is important that character is built at home rather than out on the street. This is very demanding work. It may be difficult, but it has to be carried out or the foundation of the family is endangered.

For seafaring fathers, the challenge is far greater because their working contracts require them to be abroad for long periods of time. The absence of the father makes it very difficult to deal with the needs of the family and address any issues.

Being a seafarer, I have faced these challenges. When it comes to answering the question of how to be a good father, I can only live with the truth and principles laid out by God as given in the Bible. I firmly believe that the Bible is the answer. In the Bible you can find instructions on how to be a good father. It is always my desire to obey them. I fear God and I do not follow my own ideas but rather God's. Otherwise the consequences are inevitable, and I will ultimately fail.

My wife is my help in the everyday matters in our family. We work together as one and this is a very important principle laid out in Genesis and consistent elsewhere in the Bible. While I am away at sea, she shows my authority as the father to our children. She does not immediately decide on matters that require a father's authority. For example, if our children need something, my wife tells them to wait until I call and give my approval, except in certain exceptional circumstances. In other situations, my wife always tells our children that the decision she makes will be according to my will.

When it comes to dealing with my children, one principle that I would adhere to is being careful of not provoking my children to anger. This instruction is specific to fathers as mentioned in the book of Ephesians. There are many ways of open provocation and others are so subtle that when they are not noticed, they can be destructive to children. Forcing a child to be best in school can be one provocation. I was assigned to work abroad and had lived in one progressive and advanced country where a meritocracy culture exists. Families would invest a lot of money to have their children excel in school. It is important in such a country that you excel to be successful. Some parents would force their children to study harder even to the point of exhaustion in order to be the best. I have seen many children who are the best in school but are not happy. I have observed that my children have somehow been influenced by such a culture and found them to be studying harder and staying up late at night. Especially that at the beginning of the school year

they were at the top of the class. I restrained them from striving so hard. I explained to them that studying is not about being at the top of the class. It is about learning and being educated. They must enjoy it and never see it as a competition. I refused to force my children to excel in class at the expense of compromising their health, character and their convictions.

When it comes to disciplining my children, I speak to them sternly of their wrongdoings and remind them of the possible consequences they may face concerning their behaviours and this usually is quite sufficient.

There are many instructions in the Bible on how to be a good father. One that I also adhere to is in Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" I always tell my children about Jesus and the Christian life. When we have issues to face, we turn to the Bible and ask, how would Jesus respond to it? There we build our foundation and I am thankful to God because my children come back to the teachings of the Bible.

There are also many accounts of worthless and perverse characters in the Bible because of the failure of the father to heed the principles of God, even those fathers who are zealous in serving the Lord. God's word has become my guide on what to do and what not to do. I believe that there is no formula for being a good father. All that I have to do is to ask for wisdom from God, to be faithful in His instructions and rest on His promises.

Captain Kennette sets an excellent example for other seafaring fathers by modeling his behavior generally and specifically with regard to his children, on biblical principles. He sets the standard for the behavior he expects of his children with his own behavior and tries to cultivate in them knowledge of the Bible and love for Jesus.

Mike Burleigh, Hon Chaplain with the Sailors Society in Montrose, Scotland remarks about how he tries to encourage seafarers to be intentional about bringing their children up to know, and love, and live by the Bible. He wrote to me;

As a volunteer Port Chaplain, I always try to have conversations with seafarers about their children. I encourage them to consider how they might accept one of the many children's storybook Bibles we have on display in the Sailors' Society Cabin and to practice reading the stories

aloud during their months at sea. I also offer at the same time the gift of the Derek Prince booklet 'Fatherhood' which illustrates the importance of the Biblical model.

The seafarers have many months to read these storybook Bibles and prepare themselves to make the most effective use of the very short time they will have with their children.

(I have a photograph of a Filipino seafarer reading a bedtime story to his child during a phone conversation from the Sailors' Society Cabin).

All the Filipino seafarers are very much aware that their children are learning English at school and know from their own experience the importance of being able to communicate well with written and spoken English and that proficiency is essential in a career at sea. These Children's Bibles are often the most popular books on my Cruise ship book-stall especially with those seafarers nearing the end of their contract!

I speak with the men about the ages of their children and we look at the various books I have on display and discuss which would be most appropriate for the reading age of their child.

Hopefully the men follow my suggestions to read the books themselves so that they can both demonstrate to their children their good command of the English language and explain the righteous behavior which is to be learned from each story.

Seafarers accepting Bibles in their home/heart languages are also offered Children's Bibles in that language.

Peter Tan-chi says in his book – *Motivate! 8 secrets of successful parenting* –⁴⁰ "Modeling is about authenticity, not perfection. Modeling does not mean that we must be perfect. Modeling is being authentic and real with your children. None of us is perfect. The reality is, we all make mistakes, including parents. When we make mistakes with our children, we need to model humility, by apologizing for mistakes or wrong behavior and asking our children to forgive us. By doing this, we show our children that humbling ourselves and making an apology is nothing to be ashamed of. And modeling honesty about our mistakes or failures helps build an authentic relationship with our children."

Many people look for a golden rule to follow. We all like to be good, successful fathers and mothers. But does such a golden rule exist? If it were

⁴⁰ Peter Tan-chi, *Motivate! 8 Secrets of successful parenting*, p. 13, OMF Literature, Metro Manila, Philippines.

so easy, we would probably not have so many problems raising our children. Yet there are some principles, especially taken from the Bible, that help us in parenting. Mark 9:37 *“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”* Mark 10:14 *“When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’”* Children are God’s precious gift to us. They are loved by God himself. God has a strong interest in blessing children. We might ask, what can we give to our children, that God would also give to them? Or we might also ask: How can we make sure that our children are living under God’s blessing and provision? In order to answer these questions, we need to ask ourselves first of all, how our relationship with God is. We should have a natural interest in a close relationship to God as we know that God is also interested in having a close relationship to us. If we build a good relationship with God, we will see that this has a great influence on how we train and educate our children. God is love and if we are in love with God, this kind of love will automatically flow to our children. Some guidelines however could be helpful in our desire to be a successful father or mother.

- Let your home be a place where children feel loved.

Bertram Lim says in his book “Practical Christian living”⁴¹ Psychologists have observed that a child who has never been loved is unable to love others. He grows up to become anti-social and he finds it difficult to relate to others. It is disheartening and traumatic for children to see or hear their parents quarrel. Children naturally look up to their parents and think, “Someday, I will be like dad (or mom).” How their heart sinks when their “heroes” clash not once, but repeatedly! It is even worse when parents force their children to take sides or tell them of the shortcomings of the spouse in an attempt to win the children’s sympathy. Sociologists have noted that children who grow up in homes where parents quarrel a lot often become quarrelsome spouses when they marry, thus starting another vicious circle. On the other hand, children who are not lacking in love are confident, transparent, and easy to get along with. Let your children feel

⁴¹ Bertram Lim, Practical Christian Living, p. 95 + 113, OMF Christian Literature, Metro Manila, Philippines.

loved and secure. Express your love. Hug them, kiss them, pat them on the back, spend time with them, encourage them, appreciate them.” There are some other points that are important if I want to maintain a good relationship with my children.

- Communicate a lot with your children
- Set a good example to your children
- Appreciate your children as much as you can
- Don't force your child to study beyond his ability
- Don't punish your child while you are angry
- Don't judge your child by an adult's standard

13. Which religion is the right one?

This is a tremendous question! It has troubled mankind for thousands of years. And it cannot be answered in one simple sentence. For that reason, I want to take time to describe what religion is and what people understand when they ask about religion. By the way, when I am on ships, I am often asked: What is your religion? So, I carefully think first before answering. What do seafarers expect me to say? Wikipedia describes religion as follows:

Religion maybe defined as a cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.

However, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion.⁴² Oxford Dictionary defines religion as the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a Personal God or gods. Others explain religion as a “belief in God or gods to be worshipped, usually expressed in conduct and ritual” or “any specific system of belief, worship, etc., often involving a code of ethics.” Well over 90% of the world’s population adheres to some form of religion. The problem is that there are so many different religions. Which one is the right religion? What is true religion?

The two most common elements in religions are rules and rituals. Some religions are essentially nothing more than a list of rules, do’s and don’ts, that a person must observe in order to be considered a faithful adherent of that religion, and thereby, right with the God of that religion. Two examples of rules-based religions are Islam and Judaism. Islam has its five pillars that must be observed. Judaism has hundreds of commands and traditions that are to be observed. Both religions, to a certain degree, claim that by obeying the rules of the religion, a person will be considered right with God.

Other religions focus more on observing rituals instead of obeying a list of rules. By offering this sacrifice, performing this task, participating in this service, consuming this meal, etc., a person is made right with God.

⁴² <https://www.allaboutreligion.org/what-is-true-religion.htm>.

Buddhism and Hinduism are also primarily ritual-based religions, but can also to a lesser degree be considered rules-based.

True religion is neither rules-based nor ritual-based. True religion is a relationship with God. Two things that all religions hold to be true are that humanity is somehow separated from God and needs to be reconciled to Him. False religion seeks to solve this problem by observing rules and rituals. True religion solves the problem by recognizing that only God could rectify the separation, and that He has even done so. True religion recognizes the following:⁴³

- Every person has sinned and is separated from God (Romans 3:23).
- The penalty for that sin is death and separation from God (Romans 6:23).
- Jesus came to earth to die as a sinless substitute to provide full payment for mankind's sins. He rose from the dead to show His power over death, proving His sacrifice was sufficient (Romans 5:8)
- By faith, mankind can receive God's gift of eternal life in heaven. Jesus' death was full payment and provided reconciliation with God. There is no good work we can do to add to Jesus' sacrifice (Romans 10:9-10) Ephesians 2:8-9)

You may say, "But Christians have all sorts of rules and rituals!" You're right, many Christians have a code of morality they follow, but there is a crucial distinction. Those rules and rituals are done out of a thankfulness to God and a desire to live a clean and holy life. Those rules and rituals are *not* done to obtain reconciliation with God or to earn God's favor.

True religion or true relationship?

You may have heard a Christian say that Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship. This is a way to express that true religion is more than doing good thing and making sure your good deeds outweigh the bad. True religion is accepting the relationship that Jesus wants to have with you. From that relationship, Christians are called to do good things out of thanksgiving and love for God. In fact, the Bible speaks of this very clearly...

⁴³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/true-religion.html>.

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

Here is how Fritzgerald Abarca⁴⁴, Filipino seafarer explained the subject in his own words:

Faith is very different from religion. Faith is trusting God completely for our salvation and lives without adding anything to it, while religion is more like a “help yourself salvation” without the complete trust in God. Being a part of a religion before, I have always felt that I had never trusted God for everything. I had done many things for my religion, but I was never satisfied. I was confused about the people in that religion and the way they worshipped God. I tried the things they did, but my life did not get better. I listened to what they said, and I did the things they wanted me to do for God. But it did not change me. I was just confused about the things I had to do in religion. Eventually I realized that religion is just a traditional and doctrinal thing and sometimes even political. It is very different from the faith that I now have. In the first place, faith is a lifestyle, not something traditional or doctrinal. Faith creates a unique relationship with God and people who trust in HIM completely. In religion I felt that I was isolated and confused, but in faith I put my complete trust in God and became a part of the body of Christ. In faith I realized that I am a sinner who needs someone to save me from all my sins. Christ died for us on the cross to save us and he wants us to put our genuine faith in him alone, without adding anything. His sacrifice is enough to save us from the wrath of God. Therefore, Faith is a choice for us to trust Jesus for our salvation. This is the best choice I ever made in my life. Having faith and trusting God completely means abandoning a sinful life and making God’s standards our standards.

⁴⁴ Permission granted to print this article.

14. Where can I find solutions?

You have now reached the end of this book. I hope and trust that you have made some discoveries, received encouragement and have also obtained practical help through this book. Furthermore, I hope that your seafaring colleague's beautiful testimonies have given you ideas about dealing with life on board as well as your situation at home. Perhaps you have found this book interesting, but you are still lacking any final solutions regarding your specific situation. Did you know that you are an individual who is loved and cared for by our creator JESUS CHRIST? You are so special in God's eyes that Jesus died and sacrificed his life for you. Even if you were the only person on earth, Jesus would still love you and sacrifice his life for you. Jesus cares for you and he wants you to find solutions for your life situation. So how can you find the solution best suited to your life? Do you sometimes feel that your situation is worse than the situations of others? Do you sometimes feel that other people always have it easier than you? Believe me, this is not true. It only appears to be. We human beings tend to compare ourselves with others and then it looks like other people lives are always better in some way. They seem to have fewer problems, they have better jobs, they have more money, and as a result, they enjoy life more. This is, however, only a superficial view of things. As a matter of fact, one of the solutions that will truly help us is to stop comparing ourselves with others, and to expect everything from God and not from people. God is the giver of all life. He alone can satisfy our needs. This is precisely why the Bible says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) Here Jesus encourages us to come to him with our worries, problems, questions and life situations. He wants to take care of us and provide us with what we need. He wants to give us life solutions that will really help us. This promise is especially made to people who are burdened...who feel that the problems they face are too much...and it is encouraging that Jesus says "Come to me all..."not only privileged people, not only the rich, not only the western people, but everybody is invited to come to Jesus and ask him to change his situation. Maybe you still feel that your sins or your negative thoughts are hindering you from coming to God. If that is the case, please let me encourage you to simply confess your sins directly to Jesus Christ, who promised to forgive

your sins, if you honestly confess. 1.John 1:9 says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Romans 10:9-10 says: "*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.*" If you personally come to Jesus, you have made the first very important step in life. Jesus will never ignore you. He is waiting with open arms to receive you. Jesus promises in John 14:6 "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" He wants to be your way, your truth and your life. The Bible says that "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12) and again it says: "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8)

And what happens when I sin again, you may ask? This is what Dr. Neil Anderson says:⁴⁵ "Perhaps this emphasis on God's complete acceptance of you in Christ, has raised the question: What happens to this relationship when I sin? The grace-filled answer is, that your relationship with God is based on the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are a born-again child of God in spiritual union with Him by his grace, which you received through faith. Your relationship with God was settled when you were born into his family. Just as you will always be related to your biological father and mother, you will always be related to your spiritual Father. And just as you lived in harmony with your father when you trusted and obeyed him, you will live in harmony with your heavenly Father, when you trust and obey him."

The next step after inviting Jesus Christ into your heart is to start reading the Bible. God will speak through the Bible into your life's situations. You will find thousands of wonderful God-given promises that will guide you, encourage you and strengthen you in your walk with God. Through reading the Bible you will learn what it means to enter in a relationship with God. You will clearly see the difference between religion and relationship. If you are married, you know already how important the relationship with your partner is. Now you will start to treasure a new relationship with

⁴⁵ Dr. Neil Anderson, *Victory over the darkness*, p. 37, Gospel Light, Ventura, CA, USA.

Jesus Christ, who wants to live in you and be your life's pilot in every situation.

During your time at home join a Bible believing church. Join a church where the Bible is read and taught and practiced every week, and where the Bible is the source of all life's questions and answers. In that kind of church, you will find fellowship with other likeminded Christian families, who also have one goal: To please God and follow him day by day. Pray and ask Jesus to help you find the right place of worship, and he will surely guide you.

Our best guidance is to seek to always be led by the Holy Spirit in everything we do.

Always try to find people who are not self-centered but Christ-centered. People who have a desire to please God more than people. These are the kind of people who will understand you, who care for you and who may be in a position to give you some guidance. When you find such friendship amongst your colleagues aboard ship this is a great opportunity to give time to reading the Bible aloud together and sharing your understandings. Many Port Chaplains will be delighted to help you with your Bible fellowship group and will gift you Bible study books in either English or your home language. Should you become especially interested in finding help to grow as a leader in shipboard fellowship there is the 'Church on the Ocean' training course in Manila (see appendix).

The appendix lists Bible study books and Bible Correspondence Courses plus books written specifically for seafarers.

15. People who have found the answer

We all have hearts which question but Jesus expects us to discriminate between the questioning which comes from unbelief and the questions of patient enquiry with which the Holy Spirit leads us in prayer and Bible reading. Yes we all have questions whenever we look into the future, but the Bible constantly reminds us:

“I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. ... He hath put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise unto our God.” (Psalm 40:1.3)

Be encouraged by a couple of seafarers who have found the answer for their lives. They have found God. They have found out that they can tell God about every kind of situation and problem. Big or small, it does not matter. Their stories are most encouraging;

Hi Martin,

It is a pleasure to share the story of how I accepted Jesus Christ. It happened several years ago, in 2006, while I was working as a hotel utility on a passenger ship. There were 130 of us Filipinos and 30 Japanese among the crew. Many of the crewmembers were sinners who committed adultery; and some of them were even married men and women. I was so confused that I prayed for guidance. It was at that time that I first heard the words of God in the books, *The Purpose Driven Life* and *Hardin Ng Panalangin Books 1 to 5*. I continued reading them until 2009, but I became discouraged because something always disappointed me. Every time I tried to share the Word of the Lord, no-one wanted to listen. Maybe it was because I did not have a strong faith in God, or just like Jim Sailor⁴⁶ who initially accepted Jesus, I failed because I relied on my own strength and not on spiritual food. Before I reached the fifth chapter in one of the books, I began praying that someday a pastor would come and give me answers to all of my questions.

In December, when the ship was rocked by strong waves, I was trying to sleep. We were disturbed by the rolling waves. But we arrived at the

⁴⁶ The adventures of Jim the sailor. A Bible correspondence course by Volker La-maack, SCFS port chaplain.

port, safe and sound, thank God. At noon I saw you teaching the good news to my colleagues who were eating in the crew mess area, but I couldn't go because I had to serve food to the Russians. I was extremely eager to hear the good news that you shared, because the days went by in vain talking with others about their topics: prostitutes, gambling and other vulgar things. I often stayed in my cabin when it was break time. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon I was thankful because you were still there. It seemed that someone was pushing me to approach you and say: "Give me a Bible". So I asked, and I wasn't disappointed, and I received another book about the word of God. The Bible contained the answers to my questions.

The Lord spoke to me through the Bible, and then I accepted Jesus with all my life and learned how to pray. I'm so glad that you gave me a Bible because I have wanted to have one for so long. And I read it over and over again. The Jesus film; I gradually understood the things that I previously had not understood in his parables. I surrendered my whole life to Jesus, and I know that he has forgiven me. So, I have peace in my mind and in my heart because I have found a friend who's always at my side: Jesus. Today we are not his servants but his friends. The verse John 3:16 (*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*) says it all.

Later, when I finish the tests in the "*Grasya Para Sa Mahina - The story of Jim the Sailor*" I will send you my answers. Have a great day Martin and God bless you; thank you again.

I received another message from Geovanie Daleon⁴⁷. This is what he wrote:

"I had been a Catholic since birth. I had read the Bible from cover to cover on one of my ten-month contracts, but it had no great effect on my life. I was living just the way I liked according to my plans and preferences. As a seafarer, who works long contracts at sea, I lost my way and faith to God due to loneliness and isolation and always trying to rely on my own strength.

It was more or less two years ago when I met the port chaplain Volker Lamaack. I bought an electronic Bible and he gave me a Bible correspondence course ("Ang Tulay"). I read it until chapter two but found it boring and unnecessary. I left that booklet on board when I finished my contract. Time had passed as normal and I came back on the same

⁴⁷ Permission granted to print this article.

ship (MV⁴⁸ "Laura Ann"). I joined this ship with depression and an unstable mind, due to marriage and family problems at home. I had found in the crew's mess room a copy of the correspondence course "Ang Tulay" and tried to read it one more time. I read until chapter two and found it interesting. I then read one chapter per day. When I reached chapter seven, I had learned that the Lord Jesus is waiting, knocking at my heart for very long time. That Sunday evening, I completely surrendered my whole life to Jesus Christ, confessed that I am a weak sinner, and strongly believed him as my only Savior. It was really God's plan that after a week I met Martin Otto. I told him the story of my discovery, the acceptance of Jesus in my heart. He gave me a Jesus film, one of his books (Seafarers), another Bible correspondence course and the book "The purpose driven life" by Rick Warren. All of these things were a great help to my practical and spiritual life.

Dear Martin,

Hello, how are you?

It's me... Karen Cacho...the engine cadet you met around 18th of November. I'm with my friend Eizen...it's been some time now since the day that you visited our ship in Hamburg. I know that you came to our ship three times. When I first heard that there was a missionary on our ship, I was so excited, and I know that my prayers were answered but I was greatly disappointed when my friend told me that you had already left. During those times I thought maybe it's not the right time yet for my prayers to be answered so I just went on with my work because we had to finish it as soon as we could since we were already leaving the next day. So, when I heard that you came back and were looking for me, I didn't exactly know how I should feel but when I saw you and your warm smile and greeting, I knew right that moment God had answered my prayers. You know that if I didn't have to go back to work and be faced with so many questions I would have cried every time I talked with you. I know that I told you that I've been a Christian for years now but when I watched the movie 6,000 points to Heaven, the questions that were asked of Mr. Weber there struck me. I asked myself too, do I really trust Him? Or am I just really taking Him for granted? Does the death of Jesus really matter to me? And I realized that all those times I never really knew what real love really meant. I already watched all three movies that you had brought to our ship and they made me realize many things.

⁴⁸ MV = motor vessel.

I don't really know why I am on this ship with this kind of career. All those years that I had spent in preschool, elementary and high school I had been dreaming of other things and nothing had any connection to being a sea woman. But now here I am, an engine cadet hoping to be chief engineer someday. You have no idea how happy I was that day. I had already read your book "Mga Seaman, Nakaligtaang Abutin" and I am now reading the Bible correspondence course. The movie "Fire-proof" will surely bring tears to the eyes of the other crew members. Can you tell your wife and daughters that we really appreciate their gifts? they're lovely. I am sure that your mission is going through many trials; I'll be praying for you that He might bring more workers to the mission and you can bring more souls to Jesus. Maybe one day, I can show you and your family around Palawan, and you can meet my family as well. Maybe it'll take a long time before I am able to send you the tests in Bible correspondence course since I am not really sure if I can send them to you in one of our future ports. But if another missionary visits our ship then maybe I can ask him if he can send them to you. I've read the stories in your book about Biscay Bay; we'll be passing that way. And since it's winter, I can imagine the current, as well as the winds will be stronger. Actually, before we reached Rostock this early November, we really had a hard time getting through the gales and the big waves that we met along the way. It took almost two weeks. You know it was so hard to sleep during those times because the waves were tossing our ship around like a toy or something. I know that God has greater plans for me, that's why He led me to this profession. I don't know what lies in the future for me regarding this kind of work which is really exhausting for both body and soul. Please pray for me that I may see the way which God wants me to go. There are seven other lady cadets besides me and my friend Eizen, and they are currently aboard international vessels. I'll tell them about you and your family, and I'll give them your email address if it's okay with you. Those ladies are just as thirsty as I am to hear the words of God. I hope you can meet them. Please pray for our chief officer that he might have the courage to start up fellowship on our vessel. Our ship, MV "Konmax" is already 12 years old, which is old; during these past few months we have had to stop the vessel for hours due to the problems with her engine and I've already told you that we'll be passing through Biscay Bay on our way to China so please pray for us. We'll also be going through the areas known for pirate attacks...

Martin, I thank God for sending someone like you to our ship that day. I realized that my soul was already weary, and I was losing the way.

You helped me to realize what faith really means and what it takes to be a Christian. And thank you for the caps that you gave us. The guys really love them, they wear them every day. I do too. =) God bless you and your family.

I'm looking forward to seeing you again and hopefully meeting your wife and daughters...maybe someday...

Your friend, Karen

Now I am living like never before, so happy and satisfied while on board. After every working day, I am excited to learn from the Bible about how to get closer to God. I do not feel alone now, because I believe that our God is always with me. I am tired and homesick sometimes, but then I pray and experience how the sadness leaves me through the help of Jesus. I will not forget Volker and Martin who are God's messengers for seafarers like me.

Testimony Rodrigo Failma, a Filipino Captain

When I started to work on board the ship, I was very happy with my work because I travelled around and met different kinds of people. My life was focused on all kinds of vices; smoking, drinking and girls.

But then my life on the ship became harder: I had no peace of mind due to trouble such as fighting with other crew members, always looking for a "short time affair" whenever we docked. It came to a point where I almost ended my life. Then I began to follow Buddhism and became active in this religion. But one night, I asked myself, why is my life still the same? I couldn't give up my vices. So I decided that "Buddha" was not the answer to what I was looking for.

While sailing in Europe, a missionary came to our ship, from the "Mission to Seaman" and he shared the gospel with me. At that time, it had no effect on my life, and I still carried on in my vices. When we came to the USA, a missionary came looking for me, and it surprised me to find out that this man knew about me. He said that he was one of the pastors preaching the word of God to the seafarers from the "Mission to Seaman." He shared John 3:16 with me and explained to me very clearly: For God so loved Rodrigo.... For the first time in my life, I received the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. I could not comprehend the peace and joy I began feeling then; I felt such freedom. And as the ship sailed to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and other countries, this group of missionaries continued to contact me and came looking for me whenever I arrived at a port.

I became an active Christian and joined the Young Pro of Manila Bethel Temple. As I matured in the Lord and was promoted to 3rd officer, I started to share the gospel on the ship, and many crew members received the Lord Jesus as their personal Savior because of the change in my life. The old Rodrigo who caused trouble was now a new man. I did this until a certain point when I began suffering persecution on the ship headed by a certain captain.

While reporting to our office in Manila, the office personnel made fun of me and called me "Praise the Lord." (*I was insulted by the office personnel who called after me "Praise the Lord". - Is this what he wants to say?*) The port captain became really mad at me because of the report from my captain on the ship regarding my ministry of preaching the gospel. According to that report, I was creating division and trouble among the crew. The port captain confronted me with the question of choosing between my profession or the Bible. I thought to myself, if I choose the Bible, what will happen to my brothers and sisters whom I am supporting by paying for their college education? And what about God who changed my life? I was confused for a moment, while the port captain was talking to me. I thought to myself, "Lord it is you that I want, I want to serve you." I told the port captain, I choose God. While on the bus to Laguna, my home, I just cried and told God, "I don't have a job anymore." I told my girlfriend about it, and we prayed together and thanked God for everything.

One night during our Worship Service, just like in a dream, I saw my old ship on the mountain side, and I asked the Lord: Will He bring me back to the ship? And the Lord replied to my heart, "I called you in my name!" I married my girlfriend, and many people witnessed our simple garden wedding beside the mango tree of our house in Laguna.

After a few months, I received a telegram from my shipping company asking me to report to the office immediately. My wife and I prayed, and the next day, I went to the office. Again, the office personnel welcomed me with insult saying, "Here's 'Praise the Lord'." The port captain told me that I was promoted to be a 2nd officer, and that I needed to return to the ship. I asked the Lord if it was His will. After the prayer I felt such peace in my soul.

I meditated on Jeremiah 29:11-13 about the plan of God, as well as on Hebrews 13:5, the promise of God that He will never leave us or forsake us. I returned on board the ship at the port in Vancouver, Canada, and to my surprise, I saw my old ship with my old captain, who had persecuted me and gave all the bad reports about me to the port captain In

Manila. When he found out that I was back on the ship, he talked to my new captain and crew and told all kinds of lies and bad things about me. But I just continued working and sharing the gospel.

Now I am still on the ship, and in a few years, I will be retiring as Captain. I thank God so much for His grace, mercy and love in my life and that many people are being changed by the gospel which I share on land and across the ocean through social media/face-book. Once in a while I still meet my old crew and many of them are officers who now hold “Worship Services “on board their ships; while others work in the office as fleet managers.

To God be all the glory, honor, praise and thanksgiving in the mighty name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

While writing this testimony, I can't hold back the tears in my eyes: tears of joy from all the trials and difficulties in life, all the attacks of the enemy (Satan) and tears of gratefulness for God's faithfulness which endures. He leads me in righteousness, He forgave all my sins, He cleanses me and purifies me. His grace and compassion are amazing.

Captain Rodrigo C. Failma

Finally, one more seafarer who tells his story....

I am Danilo B. Bueno, natural born Filipino from Sanchez Mira, Cagayan Valley. I am a seaman by profession having graduated from the Philippine Merchant Marine Academy in 1986. I am a Master Mariner serving on Tankers.

I started sailing in 1984 as a Deck Cadet at age 20 and since then I've been sailing around the world, visiting countries I had never dreamed of seeing. I have the opportunity to make new acquaintances of different nationalities while working and exploring different ports that we call on. I became an officer with more responsibilities, then I became a senior officer till I became a Captain in 2006. With many years of experience, at one point, I became confident, maybe too confident and so sure of myself.

As a Master, I have the final say about everything that happens on my ship. Having so much power at my disposal, I used it with GUSTO. This had been my situation on nine ships. I must have made an impression on the owners because they hired me again and again. This further boosted my EGO. Then came God – how could I have known? In spite of my boastfulness he seemed to have other plans.

On the morning 28th of October 2011, while transiting the Gulf of Aden, we were attacked by pirates and were captured. All my training and so-called expertise were of no use, I didn't know what to do. I was helpless. While in captivity we all tried to remain calm, but the thought of death was always there, and fear was present among us. Although they assured us they only needed money, we never believed them. Not with their AK 47 pointing toward us each time we moved. After a few stops in various parts of Somalia, we anchored at a place called Grad (not the exact spelling) where 50 or more pirates boarded with more guns and ammunition. They started to make an inventory of what we had, including VHF radios which the crew hid under my orders. They gave me a warning not to lie or they would kill me. Weeks passed and they found the missing radios, and the crew said the commander was angry. I knew it was my fault and because of their previous threats I thought they would do something to me. That scared me, so much that I began to tremble at the thought of never seeing my family again. I just shivered in fear. When evening came, I couldn't bear my fears any longer, so I decided to confess my fears to someone, and I thought of God. The little faith I had in God somehow led me to say to him, God I am so afraid and don't know what to do. Please take away this fear, and take care of my family, and if you want to, please take care of me too. At that instant, not even after 30 seconds, I felt something: peace and calmness came over me. I felt my tears, but I was not afraid anymore. I was calm. Not long afterwards, a pirate came and told me the pirate commander wanted to see me. I stood up, went to the bridge and my thought was "This is it" while I was walking up the stairs. I prayed the Psalm 91, whatever verse I was able to recall till I reached the bridge, and there the pirate commander asked me "Do you have a problem?" I didn't know what to say then, but I said "Yes, I'm afraid of you." He answered: "Don't worry we are not here to hurt you, go back to your crew and relax." I had been expecting death, but instead received comfort and assurance. I wondered, "Did God hear me?" On my ship were fellow Christians: The Chief Engineer, as well as the Second Mate. I joined them together with the Chief Cook and a Greek security officer and we all read the Bible.

Months passed and another trial came just after New Year, on January 2. A new interpreter came on board and said they wanted to take the ship out to sea to do piracy and they wanted me to sail the ship. Knowing we didn't have enough fuel for the voyage we told them the problem, which angered the commander, and they replied that if I was lying, they would kill me. This time they were more serious. They tied me by the

neck and hung me close to ship railings, with a guard near me. Once again, I prayed Psalm 91 and asked God to take care of my family and myself. Then a pirate came, and they talked a while (I didn't understand what they were saying) but the guard shouted "Allah U Akbar). He loaded his AK47 and pointed the gun at my head, but the other pirate pushed him away and I was safe. We were forced to sail out. I talked to the crew and told them that I had no options left and we wouldn't be able to go back with this amount of fuel. I thought this was the end. The crew said," Please don't give up, if you stop acting as Captain what will become of us"? Again, with all my training and experience, I didn't know what to do so I turned to God. I told him, "God, help us. We don't know what to do. Half way to our destination, the pirate commanders began arguing about the fuel. The Chief Engineer and I were called to them, and the atmosphere was very tense. They were all shouting, pointing guns at each other until the head commander made a gesture towards us - it was the sign of death. The guard asked us to stand. However, even before we could get up, the first interpreter asked the chief engineer what was written on a piece of paper he had found on the table of our ship. Chief Engineer said that was the amount of fuel we had on board. He turned to me with the question, "Is this enough to go to the Gulf of Aden and go back to Grad?" I answered "No". Right there in front of us they beat up the second interpreter for lying to the pirate commanders. Again, God rescued us, and I couldn't believe what was happening right then and there. I was convinced that God was watching and was listening. The next day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. A few days later the ransom was paid and we were all free.

TO GOD BE ALL THE GLORY

Appendix I

Man's Problem⁴⁹

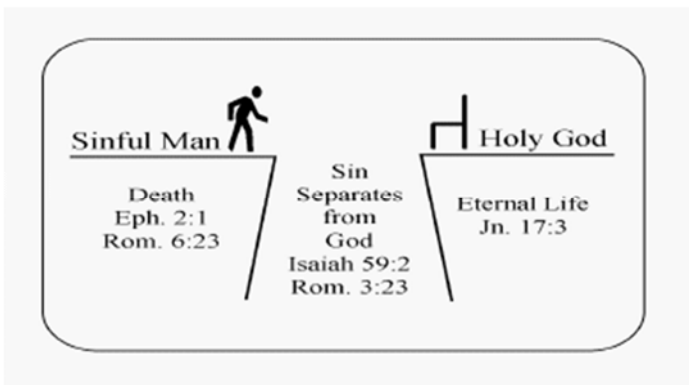
SEPARATION FROM GOD

Isaiah 59:2: But your sinful acts have alienated you from your God; your sins have caused him to reject you and not listen to your prayers.

Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

According to Romans 5:8, God demonstrated His love for us through the death of His Son. Why did Christ have to die for us? Because Scripture declares all men to be sinful. To “sin” means to miss the mark. The Bible declares “all have sinned and fall short of the glory (the perfect holiness) of God” (Rom. 3:23). In other words, our sin separates us from God who is perfect holiness (righteousness and justice) and God must therefore judge sinful man.

Habakkuk 1:13a: You are too just to tolerate evil; you are unable to condone wrongdoing.



⁴⁹ <https://bible.org/article/gods-plan-salvation>.

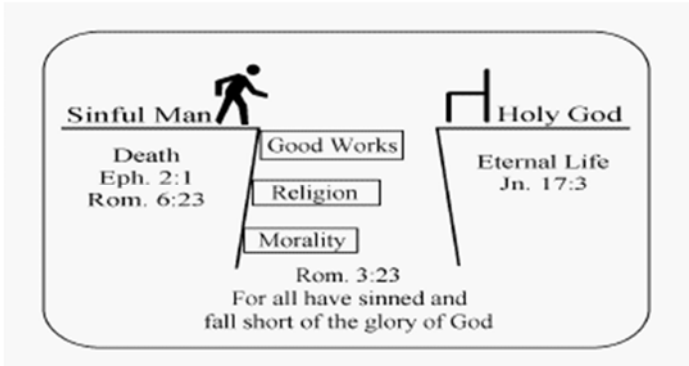
THE FUTILITY OF OUR WORKS

Scripture also teaches that no amount of human goodness, human works, human morality, or religious activity can gain acceptance with God or get anyone into heaven. The moral man, the religious man, and the immoral and non-religious are all in the same boat. They all fall short of God's perfect righteousness. After discussing the immoral man, the moral man, and the religious man in Romans 1:18-3:8, the Apostle Paul declares that both Jews and Greeks are under sin, that "there is no one righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:9-10). Added to this are the declarations of the following verses of Scripture:

Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 it is not of works, so that no one can boast.

Titus 3:5-7: He saved us, not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 And so, since we have been justified by his grace, we become heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life.

Romans 4:1-5: What then shall we say that Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh, has discovered regarding this matter? 2 For if Abraham was declared righteous by the works of the law, he has something to boast about (but not before God). 3 For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness.



No amount of human goodness is as good as God. God is perfect righteousness. Because of this, Habakkuk 1:13 tells us God cannot have fellowship with anyone who does not have perfect righteousness. In order to be accepted by God, we must be as good as God is. Before God, we all stand naked, helpless, and hopeless in ourselves. No amount of good living will get us to heaven or give us eternal life. What then is the solution?

GOD'S SOLUTION

God is not only perfect holiness (whose holy character we can never attain to on our own or by our works of righteousness) but He is also perfect love and full of grace and mercy. Because of His love and grace, He has not left us without hope and a solution.

Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

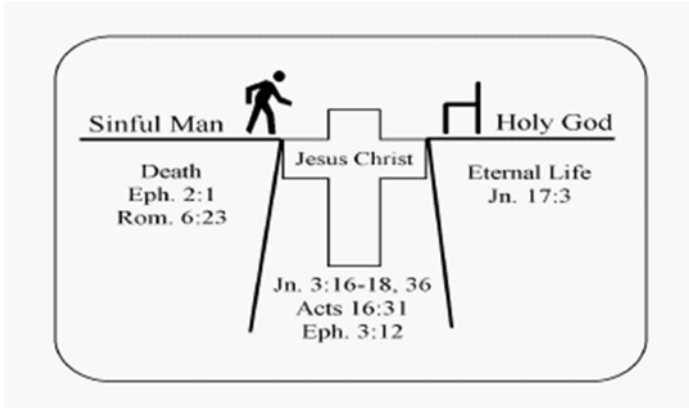
This is the good news of the Bible, the message of the gospel. It's the message of the gift of God's own Son who became man (the God-man), lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sin, and was raised from the grave proving both the fact He is God's Son and the value of His death for us as our substitute.

Romans 1:4: Who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 4:25: He was given over because of our transgressions and was raised for the sake of our justification.

2 Corinthians 5:21: God made the one who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God.

1 Peter 3:18: Because Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God, by being put to death in the flesh but by being made alive in the spirit.



HOW DO WE RECEIVE GOD'S SON?

Because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross, the Bible states "He that has the Son has life." We can receive the Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior by personal faith, by trusting in the person of Christ and His death for our sins.

John 1:12: But to all who have received him--those who believe in his name--he has given the right to become God's children

John 3:16-18: For this is the way God loved the world: he gave his one and only Son that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him. 18 The one who believes in Him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

This means we must each come to God the same way: (1) as a sinner who recognizes his sinfulness, (2) realizes no human works can result in salvation, and (3) relies totally on Christ alone by faith alone for our salvation.

If you would like to receive and trust Christ as your personal Savior, you may want to express your faith in Christ by a simple prayer acknowledging your sinfulness, accepting His forgiveness and putting your faith in Christ for your salvation.

If you have just trusted in Christ, you need to learn about your new life and how to walk with the Lord. May we suggest you start by studying through the *ABCs for Christian Growth* available online at www.bible.org. This series will take you step-by-step through some basic truths of God's Word and will help you build a solid foundation for your faith in Christ.

Appendix 2

PORT CHAPLAINS:

These mobile phone apps will help you make contact with Chaplains in ports across the world.

Wellness at Sea: You can find this app, which was developed by Sailors' Society specifically for The Seafarer, on your phone App Store. When you have the app on your phone follow the sequence of titles below to arrive at the information about Chaplains in ports worldwide.

Wellness at sea App/port search/show me services at this port/here you will find listed the chaplains, ITF Inspectors and the Seafarer Centers.

IMPORTANT: The Port Search section of the Wellness at Sea App makes available to all seafarers information provided by Shipping Guides Ltd (<https://www.portinfo.co.uk>) which is relied upon by ship captains, shipping companies and agents and is therefore complete, up to date, and very reliable. (Please email info@portinfo.co.uk if you are able to update the information provide.)

- **International Christian Maritime Association / ICMA:** <https://icma.as/icma-members/>
- **Seamen's Christian Friend Society:** www.scfs.org/welcome
- **Mission to Seafarers:** <https://www.missiontoseafarers.org>
- **Sailors-Society:** <https://www.sailors-society.org/chaplain>
- **Apostleship of the Sea:** <https://www.apostleshipofthesea.org.uk>

The following illustrations are from the ISWAN 'Seafarers Health Information Programme' booklet 'Managing Stress and Sleeping Well at Sea' and evidence that there is much further helpful practical information on this website which can be downloaded when you are next at a Seafarers Centre offering free Wi-Fi.

16 Managing Stress and Sleeping Well at Sea

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR SLEEP

Although you might not be in control of your shift patterns, there are some simple and straightforward techniques to help you get the best from your sleep. The most important thing is to allow your body to learn a rhythm of sleep and wakefulness. Developing good habits around sleep can help you tolerate the times when your sleep is disturbed by shifts or unavoidable disruptions.

PREPARE YOUR CABIN FOR SLEEP

Our bodies are naturally aligned to wakefulness during the daylight hours and sleep during the hours of darkness. Using light and dark can help you to get a better sleep even if your shift patterns mean that you have to be alert during the normal night hours. When you want to be awake and alert use bright lighting – daylight bulbs if they are available or open the curtains and let the sunlight in, during hours of daylight. Use blackout blinds or curtains in the period before and during sleep and dim the lighting in your cabin. If your cabin still isn't dark enough, try to prepare ahead and bring an eye mask with you on your next voyage.

Do what you can to make sure your cabin is a relatively cool and comfortable temperature, is quiet and your bed is comfortable. There may need to be a ship policy of keeping quiet around the cabins for people who are trying to sleep during the day. If noise is a problem, you can try using ear plugs or putting on soothing music, white noise or sounds of nature.



- Exercise is excellent for a good night's rest. Take exercise during the day, but not late in the evening.



- Take time to relax and wind down from the activities of the day.



- If you are worrying about problems at home or at sea, try writing them down and putting them out of your mind before bed. Make time to address these problems during the day, otherwise they will pop into your mind when you least want them to.



- Do not eat heavy or spicy foods in the few hours before going to bed.



- Have your last tea, coffee or energy drink several hours before you want to sleep.



- Set an alarm at a regular time each day (if your shifts do not vary). Get up when your alarm goes off, regardless of the amount of sleep you have had during the night. This will help teach your body to develop a consistent rhythm.



- If you do not work shifts, avoid taking naps during the daytime.

In the period just before sleep, establish a pre-bedtime routine. This teaches your body when it is time to wake and time to sleep.



- Put away your computer, phone or any electrical devices with backlit screens when you go to bed and try not to use them in the period before you want to go to sleep. The light on these devices trigger your brain to wake up and become alert. Put devices on to silent, flight mode or the do not disturb setting so that noise and light notifications do not draw your attention or disturb your sleep.



- If possible, use your bed only for sleep. If you routinely lie in bed playing on your phone, eating, drinking, smoking, watching TV or even working, it is hard for your body to associate bed and sleep. Try to keep your waking activities separate from your bed.



- A warm shower before bed can regulate your core temperature and make it easier to drop off to sleep.



- Only go to bed when you are tired and ready for sleep.



- Try other quiet activities just before sleeping, like mindfulness, breathing exercises, listening to relaxing music or reading a book. Prayer can also be relaxing for people of faith.



- Relaxation exercises like the one on pages 6 and 7 can be very effective in helping your mind to switch off, distracting you from everyday worries and helping your body to get into the right state for sleep. Many people find that when they lie down to go to sleep is the best time to practice relaxation, because then you can just drop off afterwards and it has the added bonus of a better, more restful sleep.

18 Managing Stress and Sleeping Well at Sea

**FATIGUE RELATED TO SHIFT WORK:
TIPS FOR USING NAPS**

- You may have the opportunity to take naps during breaks before or after your full/long sleep which may help you feel more alert or rested. Most people need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep. You may need to take this in one longer and one shorter nap.



- A nap of up to 2 hours can be an effective way of preparing for a night shift. Allow yourself at least 30 minutes or more after waking to overcome 'sleep inertia', the groggy feeling you have on waking.



- If you have a fixed night shift, treat the shift as your normal working day and adjust your meals and sleep times around it.



- If you have control over the shift rotation pattern, try to rotate your shifts with the clock, advancing the time you need to go on shift.



- Brief naps can also be effective – limit the nap to less than 30 minutes; even 10-20 minutes can make a positive difference. Naps of 40 minutes and longer may have the opposite effect, making you feel groggy and less clear headed, particularly when you immediately wake up.



- 'Caffeine naps' have been shown to be an effective short term strategy for keeping alert. Drink a coffee just before having a 20 minute nap and set your alarm to wake up in 20 minutes – on waking, the caffeine will be acting on your system and recent research suggests that you may be more alert than having either the nap or the caffeine alone.

Please note: this advice is for shift workers only.



Resources

Dr. Neil T. Anderson, The bondage breaker, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, USA

Dr. Neil T. Anderson, Victory over the darkness, Gospel Light, Ventura, California, USA

Dr. Alban Douglas, God's answers to Man's questions, Cause & Effect Ministries Inc., Columbia S.C., USA

Global leadership Center, Family Life, CCF Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines

Bertram Lim, Practical Christian Living, OMF Literature, Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, Philippines

Rose Marie Miller, From Fear to freedom, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, U.S.A.

Peter and Deonna Tan-chi, Motivate! 8 secrets of successful parenting, OMF Literature, Metro Manila, Philippines

Rick Warren, The purpose driven life, Grand Rapids, USA, Zondervan Publishing 2002

Internet Websites

<https://www.allaboutreligion.org/what-is-true-religion.htm>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/true-religion.html>

<https://safetyatsea.net/news/news-crew-wellbeing/2019/the-effects-of-bullying-on-crew/>

<https://safetyatsea.net/news/news-crew-wellbeing/2019/prioritise-crew-wellness/>

Other books and study courses written specifically for seafarers by Martin Otto and Volker Lamaack:

Martin Otto, Help, how can I overcome temptation?

Martin Otto, Faith at Sea

Martin Otto, Seafarers a strategic missionary vision

Martin Otto, Church on the oceans

Volker Lamaack, The Bridge – Bible correspondence course

Volker Lamaack, Grace For The Weak – Bible correspondence course

Volker Lamaack, The Only Bridge – Bible course

Volker Lamaack, The Prison at Sea

All these books are available through the authors or our Seamen's Center in Intramouros⁵⁰. All books are in English and Tagalog and/or Taglish. All of the books contain seafarers' testimonies and practical lessons gleaned from their experiences.

Other Bible study books and Bible Correspondence Courses:

<https://emmausinternational.com/>

CHURCH ON THE OCEAN: This training course is conducted four times a year: January, April, July and October at the Seamen's Centre in Manila.

To apply or to obtain further information please contact:

Seamen's Christian Friend Society: bayaniaudea@gmail.com

⁵⁰ Seamen's Christian Friend Society, Philippines, Corp. Plaza Bldg, 2nd Floor, Recoletos St., Cor. Magalanes, Intramouros, Metro Manila.