

The Stars, the Wind, the Seas

Gene Ruyle, in his book *Making a Life*, tells a story about Eliazar Hull, the captain of a whaling ship who sailed from the ports of New England in the early 1800s.

Hull was able to sail out farther, stay out longer and, in that way, come back with a larger catch than anyone else. The owners of the fleet, seeking to insure their ships against damage or loss at sea, asked that all ship captains be schooled in the latest navigational techniques of the day.

When Hull arrived for training, the instructors – who had long since heard of his amazing sailing prowess – asked him how he was able to navigate the vast distances of such lengthy voyages without losing his way.

Hull replied, “I go up on deck at night, and I look at the stars, and I listen to the wind in the riggings, and I check the drift of the seas, and then I set my course.”

After completing his course in the science of navigation, Hull returned home and resumed his maritime vocation.

Sometime later, the instructors visited Hull and once again asked how he navigated his great ship.

“Exactly like you taught me,” he responded to everyone’s surprise. “I use the sextant to shoot the angle of the sun at midday. After fixing my longitude and latitude on the charts, I get out my compass and other instruments to plot my course.

“And then,” he continued, “I go up on deck at night and I look at the stars and listen to the wind in the riggings, and I check the drift of the seas – and go back down to correct my calculations.”

Interesting story, huh?

God gave us brains. He meant for us to use them.

Of course, we are all aware that our brains and our experiences can mislead us. Few thinkers have ever surpassed the immortal Greek philosopher Aristotle, and yet Aristotle made mistakes.

For example, he taught that if a one-pound ball and a five-pound ball of the same size were dropped at the same time from the same height, the five-pound ball would fall five times as fast as the one-pound ball. That was reasonable, and for nearly 2,000 years, it was accepted as fact.

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But then Galileo dropped two such balls from the tower of Pisa. They hit the ground at the same time. One of the great thinkers of all time had been wrong.

So can we be. Nevertheless, we must begin our search for learning and truth with a modest confidence in the reliability of our own brains.

And there is certainly nothing wrong with testing out new ideas or thought processes to validate their conclusions.

But test everything; hold fast what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter

