

## AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

### Repentance, a Precious Gift

Elder Vern P. Stanfill

Second Counselor, Africa West Area Presidency



Elder Stanfill

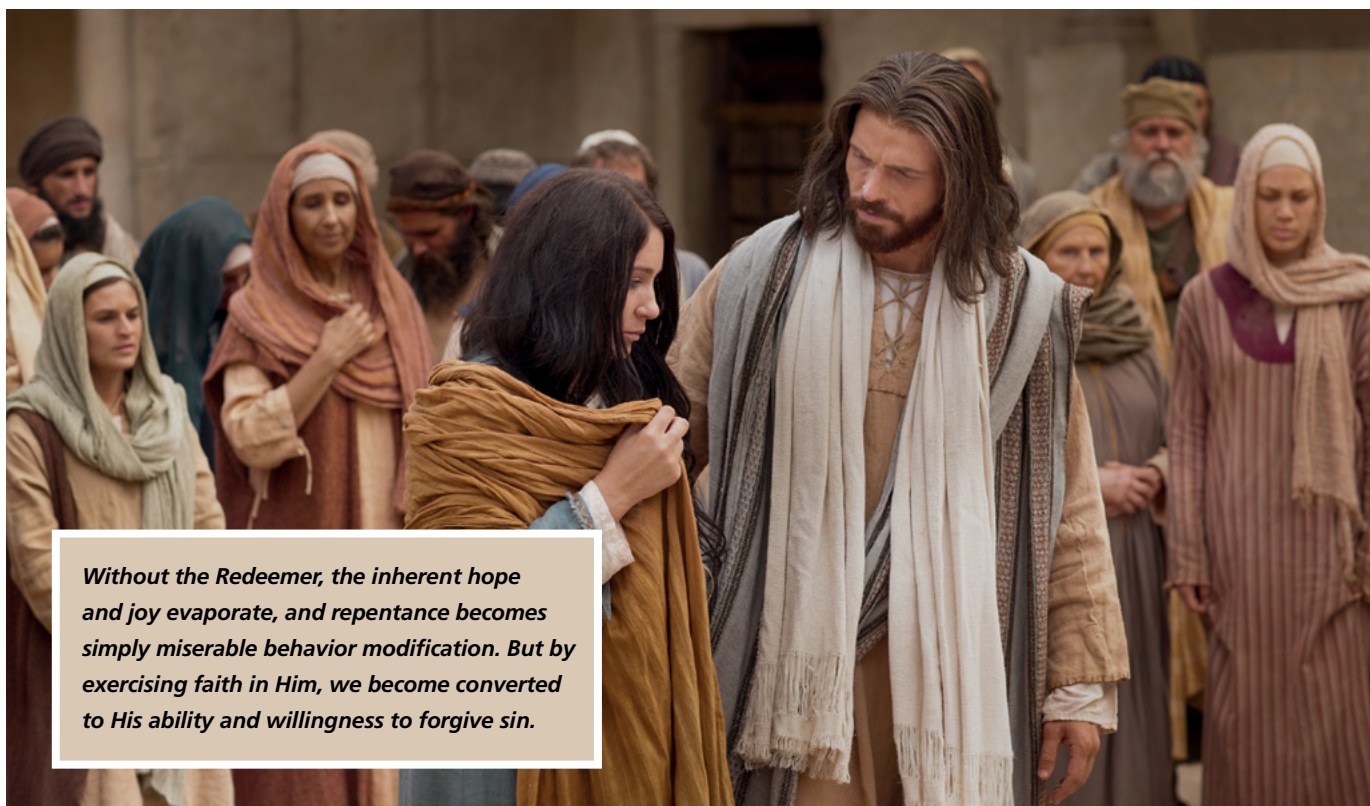
I believe that often we look at repentance as a negative thing. We know that it can be difficult and emotionally uncomfortable to admit our shortcomings and confess our sins before our Heavenly Father. Too often we look at repentance as penance for misdeeds or serious transgressions. We view it as a process, without recognizing the result and therefore shy away from and avoid discussion and private

pondering about this necessary and joyful gift from our Heavenly Father. Helaman taught his sons:

“And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins.

“And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.”<sup>1</sup>

This is perhaps one of the simplest yet most important of all doctrines. It is repentance that opens to us the



*Without the Redeemer, the inherent hope and joy evaporate, and repentance becomes simply miserable behavior modification. But by exercising faith in Him, we become converted to His ability and willingness to forgive sin.*

power of the Redeemer, “unto the salvation of our souls”. If one ponders our relationship with the father, it is easy to understand that the greatest gift given to us, as his children, is a Savior.

In the simplest terms, without the gift of repentance, we cannot experience true joy in this life or in the life to come.

Imagine that you are in a lovely room in a beautiful building. Those whom you love surround you and you are happy. You look around and see another room that beckons you to explore. As you peak through the door of this room you are tempted to continue your inspection. Upon entry the door shuts behind you, automatically locks, and the lights go out. Now you know that you have made a mistake. It is dark, without fresh air, and what seemed enticing now has become a prison. Then you hear the door unlock, but it does not open. You must open the door and step back into the beautiful room. The Savior’s power, even the power of the Redeemer has unlocked the door but you must turn the handle and step back into the light. This simple analogy teaches us a number of lessons. First we learn that while sin may be enticing it will rob us of any true joy. The result of sin is unhappiness. Remember the uncomfortable feeling as you imagined the door locking and the lights going out.

Second we learn that we need someone to intervene. The door is locked. There is nothing that we can do from our side of the door. We are helpless and hopeless without someone on the other side who has the key. The Savior is the key. He is the only person who has the power to open the door and free us from the effects of sin.

And finally we learn that while the door is now unlocked we must turn the handle and step across the threshold into the light. Repentance requires our action. It requires us to change. Repentance is change. Elder Renlund recently taught, “Changing our behavior and returning to the “right road” are part of repentance, but only part. Real repentance also includes a turning of our heart and will to God and a renunciation of sin. As explained in Ezekiel, to repent is to “turn from . . . sin, . . . do that which is lawful and right; . . . restore the pledge, . . . [and] walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity.”

Yet even this is an incomplete description. It does not properly identify the power that makes repentance possible, the atoning sacrifice of our Savior. Real repentance must involve faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith that He can change us, faith that He can forgive us, and faith that He will help us avoid more mistakes. This kind of faith makes His Atonement

effective in our lives. When we “perceive afterwards” and “turn around” with the Savior’s help, we can feel hope in His promises and the joy of forgiveness. Without the Redeemer, the inherent hope and joy evaporate, and repentance becomes simply miserable behavior modification. But by exercising faith in Him, we become converted to His ability and willingness to forgive sin.<sup>2</sup>

We should recognize that it is only through the power of Christ the Redeemer that true repentance can occur. Amulek teaches this doctrine as clearly as it has ever been taught:

“And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.

And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which over powereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.

And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, . . .”<sup>3</sup>

There is something so comforting in the phrase encircles them in the arms of safety. There is great joy in repentance, both for the sinner and for the Savior. As any parent, our

Heavenly Father wants his children to be safe. He has provided a way for us to be “encircled in the arms of safety” through repentance.

None will walk through this life without stumbling across the threshold that divides happiness from sin. We will all know its pain but because of our Heavenly Father and his son’s intense love for us there is a path back to joy. One of my favorite scriptures is found in Alma 36. Alma is telling his son Helaman of a most sacred experience.

“Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

“And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as my pain!”<sup>4</sup>

I believe that Alma wants to help his son understand how intense the joy of repentance is. It is almost as though Alma has difficulty describing the joy he felt. Repentance is a key to joy.

Brothers and Sisters, I am intensely grateful for what the Savior has done and continues to do for me. For me,

repentance is a daily exercise. I think daily of those things that are keeping me from knowing the Savior as perfectly as I can. I am grateful that changing daily brings me closer to him. It brings me joy to know him better through repentance. It is my

prayer that we accept this most precious given to us all. In his Holy Name even Jesus Christ. Amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. Helaman 5:10–11.
2. Dale G. Renlund, “Repentance: a Joyful Choice,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 121.
3. Alma 34:14–16.
4. Alma 36:18–20.

#### CHURCH HISTORY COLUMN

## New Stake Created in Liberia

Adapted from Mormon Newsroom article

*Historic occasion marks the creation of 74th Stake in the West Africa Area*

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints assembled to participate in the creation of the first stake in Liberia on

November 27, 2016 and in a cultural celebration on November 26 which commemorated the growth of the Church in that country.



*New Stake Presidency, from left to right: Obediah T. Wiah, stake clerk; Joseph G. David, second counselor; Prince S. Nyanforth, stake president; Adolphus Z. Dougbah, Sr., first counselor; Jalay Geeplay, executive secretary*



Elder Terence M. Vinson, President of the Africa West Area, presided over the conference. He commented, “This historic occasion of creating a stake in Liberia is just the tip of the iceberg. It is a direct consequence of the faith

and dedication of the Liberian members of the Church in the face of great adversity. Its presence will unify the members of the Church and provide additional strength and determination, which will lead to this being the first of several stakes in Liberia within the next two years.”

From a fledgling beginning of two branches in the early 1980s, growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been constant. Though

the country has faced civil war, devastating disease and extreme poverty, there has been continued growth of Church membership. The faith, dedication and strength of committed members in Liberia have resulted in the current total of 10,991 Latter-day Saints.

The newly formed stake was called the Monrovia Liberia Bushrod Island Stake. Prince Sonpon Nyanforh, was called to serve as stake president, with Joseph Gbaime David as first



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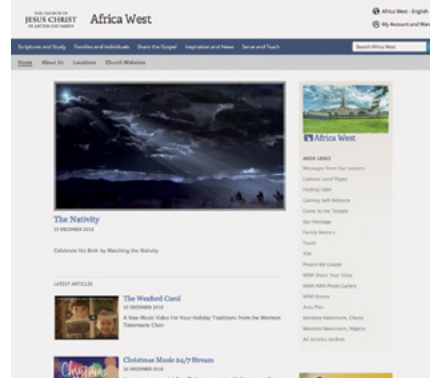
counselor and Adolphus Zinnah Dougbah Sr. as second counselor. At the conference, President Nyanforh challenged the members “to build strong family units and follow the pattern Jesus Christ set by living the gospel fully.”

A stake president and his counselors, along with all leaders and teachers, are not paid for their service, but donate their time to serve the congregations they preside over.

The Church has had a presence in Liberia since in the early 1980s when two branches were formed to meet the needs of foreign members working in the country. Missionaries arrived in July 1987, and the first baptism was performed on August 22, 1987 in the waters of Kontiki Beach Lagoon.

Along with this first stake, there is one mission, three districts and 22 branches of the Church in Liberia. ■

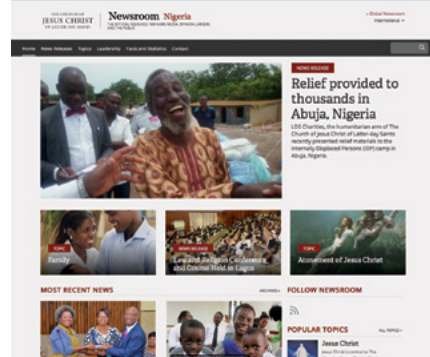
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Africa West Area Websites:  
 English: [africawest.lds.org](http://africawest.lds.org)  
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# Sacrifice Brings Unexpected Blessings

By Elder Jerat-Kennedy Chukwuemeka Igwe

Area Seventy



Elder Igwe

Sometime before the dedication of Aba Nigeria temple, when the temple was under construction, the president of Aba Nigeria Stake organized a meeting to be held on the first Sunday evening of every month for all endowed members in the stake. The objective of this meeting was to enable these members to share and remember their temple experiences while they were awaiting the completion of the temple in Nigeria.

While the meeting very successful initially, attendance began to dwindle and soon many stopped coming. Only

a few endowed members who wanted to sustain the leaders still came.

At the time, I was serving as a Bishop, and I was also attending a polytechnic school on regular basis to obtain my Higher National Diploma.

One Fast Sunday, when a meeting was to be held, I was scheduled to take the final exam for one of my most difficult courses the next morning. After sacrament meeting, we had to travel to the stake center for a devotional which took almost the whole afternoon. Concerned about the exam I was going to have the next morning, I approached

the stake president and requested to be excused from the endowed members' meeting to be held in about two hours. I told him I needed to go home and prepare for the important examination I was to take the next morning.

My stake president, understanding the implication of my absence from the meeting to others, made a promise to me that if I stayed for this meeting I was going to make my best score in this course. With much hesitation, I agreed to stay even though I knew the sacrifice I was being asked to make.

After the meeting, I went home so tired that I fell right asleep. I woke up in the middle of the night and read as much I could but by the next morning I did not consider myself fully ready for the exam. I did my best and felt very sure I was not going to fail the course but I was not certain how well I would do. To my great surprise, when the result came out I had scored an A. This experience strengthened my resolve to always sustain and support my leaders no matter the level of sacrifice requested of me.

President Joseph F. Smith said, "It is a serious wrong in the presence of the Almighty for one not to sustain the authorities of the church and then



*"It is an important duty resting upon the saints who vote to sustain the authorities of the church to do so not only by the lifting of hand, the mere form, but in deed and truth."*

to go away and oppose them and trample underfoot the counsels that they give, and he will be judged of the Lord for it. It is an important duty resting upon the saints who vote to sustain the authorities of the church to do so not only by the lifting of hand, the mere form, but in deed and truth.”<sup>1</sup>

In John 15:16, The Lord said to His Apostle, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give of you.” “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.” (Matthew 10:24)

In our day, the same teaching was again given to the saints through the Prophet Joseph Smith at Kirtland Ohio. In Doctrine and Covenants 64:33–34 we read, “Wherefore, be not weary in well—doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great. Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days.”

I do know that as we serve in obedience to the counsels of our leaders that the blessing of the Lord will be upon us. In Jesus name, amen. ■

#### NOTE

1. In Brian H. Stuy, comp, *Collected Discourses Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, 5 vols. (1987–92), 4:298.

## It’s Good to Be Home

By Kwesi Badu Mensah and Mercy Ohenewaa

### Kwesi’s story, Seminary and Institute Coordinator, Kumasi

I met Mercy, a seventeen-year-old woman and second year high school student, on one of my visits to the Asokwa Ward seminary class to observe and assist the class. It was her voice that drew my attention to her. She had a unique way of expressing her understanding of the gospel in her voice. However, a few days later, I visited the class again only to find that Mercy had stopped attending. Upon inquiry, I was told that her dad had asked her to stop coming to our Church and seminary. I felt very sad and began to wonder what could have gone wrong.

After the seminary class, I visited Mercy’s house with her seminary teacher. We found Mercy and her mother cooking. We interacted with the family and asked the mother to intervene on Mercy’s behalf to be allowed to come back to our church, but her mother said everything was in the hands of her father, who stays and works in Tema. He only comes to Kumasi when his circumstances permit. We left the house disappointed but we knew our Heavenly Father is well able when we petition Him. I asked Mercy to pray, and we, together with members of her ward, would do the same.

In another visit to her house, I was full of hope that the situation in Mercy’s house had normalized and she had been given the opportunity to go back to church and seminary. But alas, the situation was the same. Mercy had for some time been going to another church with her mother. I felt impressed to talk to the father on the phone, so I asked permission from the mum to speak to her husband. She gladly obliged and gave me his phone number. The phone number stayed with me for days as I prayed to God for help to speak to Mercy’s father.

One fine afternoon and in the quiet of my office, I knelt to ask God for help to speak with Mercy’s father, whom I had not met. My heart was pounding as I placed the call. I introduced myself to him as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and seminary coordinator over the ward Mercy attended. We had a pleasant conversation on the phone, and I concluded by challenging him to find an LDS Church in Tema to find out what his daughter and son were missing by not attending. He accepted the challenge, but I did not hear from him again. Recently I visited the Asokwa Ward for an YSA program, and there was Mercy, smiling and happily

mingling with other young adults. Could my phone call have assisted in her return? I asked her to share her side of the story.

### **Mercy's Story, Asokwa Ward, Kumasi**

Having been taught the gospel by the missionaries, my brother and I came to know that the message was true. Although family members and friends criticized us, we were prepared to go on and learn more of the gospel. As time went on, my parents gave us permission to be baptized and become members of the LDS Church.

Then, to our surprise, on July 18, 2015, my dad told us to stop attending the LDS Church. I could not believe my ears! The question I kept on asking myself was why, why would the very person who agreed for me to be baptized, now tell me to leave the Church? In tears I asked him why but he was not prepared to give me an answer. The following day, when we were leaving for Church, my mum told me to tell the members that my brother and I were leaving the LDS Church—but I didn't.

A week later, when we were about to leave for Church, my dad called me and told me that if I decide to disobey his orders I should be prepared to look after myself. The kind of anger I felt from his tone as he spoke made me afraid. When we went to church that day I told the leaders what my dad had said, and they advised us to obey him.

They added that they would come over and speak with him. Unfortunately, they couldn't meet with him because he had returned to Tema.

From that time forth, I began making excuses, always engaging myself with school activities, and for more than three months I spent my Sundays mostly at school and sometimes at home. When I finally ran out of excuses my brother and I had no option but to go with my mum to her church. I remember our first visit to my mum's church. The church elders came to interview us and asked, "If you are allowed to go back, would you?" I answered, "Yes!" without hesitation. They began teaching us their doctrines, but we were not prepared to let go of that which we had been taught.

We knew, within ourselves, that one day we would go back. However, the more we tried, the more our chances of going back decreased. But the LDS Church never gave up on us. The leaders kept on interacting with my mum and the family, and the missionaries also went on teaching us. Each visit they encouraged us to pray that my dad would have a change of heart.

One Sunday I was informed of a Church activity that was being held on the following day. I was desirous to attend the program, so I sought permission from my mum and she told me to ask my dad first. That evening when he

called I told him of it, but he became so angry that he abruptly ended the call. He didn't call us for several days, and when he finally did he wasn't prepared to speak to me. During this troubling time, we prayed and studied our scriptures as the leaders of the Church have taught us. I remember it was February 15, 2016, exactly a week after the program: our dad called and told us that we were free to go back to the LDS Church if that is what we really wanted. We thought he was still angry, so we asked him if he was. He said no. He also added that if anyone asked us why we have returned to Church, we should just tell them that he had permitted us to go back. We became so excited we couldn't wait to go back to seminary and Church! That joyful feeling has never left us.

The day that we returned to Church, the words that kept on repeating in my mind were: "It's good to be home!" We felt great joy and peace in our heart, soul and mind. I thank my Heavenly Father for His tender mercies and for allowing this miracle to happen in our lives. We are also eternally grateful to our earthly father and mother for graciously allowing us to come back to the fold and to be nourished with the good words of Christ. I am glad the members and the missionaries did not give up on us but encouraged, prayed and visited us during our brief absence from the Church. ■