

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Focus on the Savior

By Vern P. Stanfill

Second Counselor, Africa West Area Presidency



Vern P. Stanfill

Today we live in times where distractions surround us. In fact, we spend a good deal of time seeking distraction from our everyday lives. We plan outings, go to movies, watch television, meet with friends, play games, and listen to music all to distract us from the humdrum of everyday life. Such distractions are often good and necessary to provide us with the rest needed to continue in the tasks that consume our lives. Unfortunately, however, the world that surrounds us can divert our attention away from those things that really matter.

While I was training to be a pilot, I was subject to countless examinations and flight tests. During the flight tests, the examiner would often create an emergency, and then, while I struggled to deal with the problem by going through appropriate checklists and following established procedures, he would start to talk about his family or ask questions about mine. He would sometimes point out beautiful or interesting things on the ground or drop his notebook, creating additional confusion in the cockpit. He did it in a way that suggested the emergency was no big deal and that real pilots were able to remain

so calm that they could carry on casual conversations while executing emergency procedures.

All of this was a ploy to distract my attention away from the critical and most important task at hand. Often the resolution to the problem was a switch that was placed in the wrong position or something else very simple. However, if the examiner could cause me to miss the item on the checklist or falter in the procedure at the moment where that switch was checked, then I failed. The adversary uses similar tactics to divert our focus away from the Savior and His gospel.

Elder J. Thomas Fyans, an emeritus member of the Seventy, related a

wonderful parable that illustrates this principle. A merchant found a pearl of rare beauty. Its luster and color were beyond comparison. He contemplated the beautiful and rare jewel, deciding that he must make a special box to hold such a perfect gem. He hired a skilled craftsman to construct an ornate and beautiful box to house the perfect pearl. The carving and metal work on the box were of wonderful workmanship and exquisite in every way. The merchant was satisfied. He was anxious to show his pearl to his friends so that they could enjoy its remarkable and unusual perfection. He placed the box in his home and invited others to come see. To his great disappointment, those who came



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ignored the precious pearl resting in the box and admired only the box. Those who had been invited to experience the beauty of the pearl became distracted by the box.

It is often easy for us to become distracted and miss the pearl that our Heavenly Father is trying to show us. In many instances in the scriptures, it is quite easy to identify the distraction causing people to miss the point. The woman at the well became distracted with the traditions that forbade a Jew from speaking to a Samaritan. “Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9).

The multitude became distracted with the fish and loaves and missed the miracle. “Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man, shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:26–27).

In our 2016 Africa West Area plan, we as an Area Presidency state the vision: **“With faith, we will look to the Savior. We will love, trust, and know Him. This will lead**

us to seek for ourselves and our families all the blessings of the temple and eternal life.” The important principle is that we will focus on the Savior. We will look past the distractions in our lives and look to the Savior. Brothers and Sisters, the Savior has made Himself and His

Atonement available to us. He will help us through this life. May we see the distractions of this life for what they are and focus on the Savior to receive the many blessings He extends to us. May we follow a path that leads us to truly know Him.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

CHURCH HISTORY COLUMN

Write a Meaningful Journal

Compiled by Charles Sono-Koree

Area Church History Adviser, Africa West Area

Your life is a unique experience, one that is worth capturing in detail for yourself, your posterity, and for members of the Church interested in Church history. Below are a few suggestions on how to write a meaningful journal.

Write with a future Church audience in mind. What would you like your future children or grandchildren to know about you when they read your journal?

- Give some detailed description to your “manner of life, [your] faith, and works” (D&C 85:2). In 20 years, the world will be a different place and your family (and historians!) will want to know about the things we now take for granted.

- Personal feelings are very important in journal writing. In fact, this may be one of the main reasons for keeping a journal. However, do not overlook the history that is happening around you. You may want to comment on external events and how they impact what you are doing.
- Always record your spiritual experiences. You may want to use the template on the next page to help organize your thoughts when writing about such experiences.

The preservation and future use of your journal is important. Please consider the following:

1. If you are writing your journal by hand, write in black or blue ink. It microfilms or scans the best.



Other types of ink and pencil will fade with time.

2. Write as neatly as you are able. People in the future may be reading what you write. Typing it on a computer may be better. If you do this, be sure to always back up your work on a separate storage device. You may want to print your journal and keep a paper copy.
3. Do not use cheap scotch tape or cheap glue to stick things in your journal. This will ruin the paper and everything close to it. If you want to include copies of articles from

- newspapers, make a photocopy first and place the photocopy in the journal. (Newsprint contains chemicals that bleed onto other pages.)
4. Set aside a specific time and strive to be a regular journal writer. Develop this into a habit. You may write daily, weekly, on once a month. The important thing is to be consistent.

Recording Personal and Family Spiritual Experiences

The Apostle James taught that anyone desiring wisdom can receive

guidance from God: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). The Lord said, “And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hear-keneth to the voice of the Spirit” (D&C 84:46).

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has encouraged Church members “to find ways to recognize and remember God’s kindness. It will build our testimonies. . . . You and they [your family members] will be blessed as you remember what the Lord has done” (“O Remember, Remember,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 67).

You may want to create an outline of a special experience, then use that outline to write a narrative or history.

The Outline

- Title—give your thoughts a title.
- Date—when did it occur (record the year, season, day, and time)?
- People—list the people involved in this experience.
- Location—where did it happen (list the place of this experience)?
- Circumstances—what were you doing at the time (list historical and personal details)?
- Wisdom—what did you learn from this experience? ■



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His Excellency President John Dramani Mahama of Ghana greets Africa West Area President, Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr., of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

His Excellency John Dramani Mahama Receives Elder LeGrand R. Curtis, Jr. in the Flagstaff House

Adapted from Mormon Newsroom

Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr., President of the Africa West Area of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was granted

audience by the President of Ghana, His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, on January 12, 2016, at the Flagstaff House.

Discussions centered on the role of the Church in building a good society. Elder Curtis explained that the Church is non-partisan in political



President John Dramani Mahama greets leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the Flagstaff House.

activities but teaches its members to be good citizens and support good principles of government.

In response, President Mahama thanked Elder Curtis for the good work of the Church in Ghana both spiritually and temporally. He was happy the Church encourages its members to be good citizens.

Accompanying Elder Curtis were Elders Daniel Yirenya-Tawiah and John Atta Koranteng of the Seventy; Sister Marian Esiape, Human Resource Manager of the Africa West Area office; and other Church leaders. ■



His Excellency President John Dramani Mahama and Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr. meet at the Flagstaff House in Accra, Ghana.

MEMBER TESTIMONY

A Blessing Made the Difference

By Nelson Silas Osogwu, Abuja, Nigeria

One morning in December, my friend Sule informed me of challenges his wife had with her pregnancy. She was past her due date by the scan result. Since I lived close, I

visited with them to see her condition. I met her in a restless condition, but I had a feeling that she was going to be OK. I asked my friend if he had given her a priesthood blessing, and he said no. After a while I left. I went back again in the evening. This time she was stable but worried because the labor pains had gone. I suggested that we should be praying for her that she would be OK.

In the evening of New Year's Day, Brother Sule called me again to tell me that his wife was bleeding. She was rushed to the hospital but was then transferred to a bigger hospital. I told him to wait till daybreak and that she would be fine. When I visited the next morning, Sister Thomas was very worried because she had been informed that the baby was in a breech position and would require a cesarean section.

After the normal morning check-up by the nurse, Brother Sule's wife requested a priesthood blessing. I pronounced the blessing as directed by the Holy Ghost, and immediately after the blessing she said she was feeling something moving in her body. She was assisted to sit well so that she could relax. I then excused myself. In less than an hour, she delivered a baby boy without surgery or complication. As I went back to see the baby, all we could say was "There's power in the priesthood." ■



MISSIONARY MOMENTS

Blessed with Priesthood Power

Ludovic Attiogbe, Lomé Togo Stake

Although he was only 13 years old, Ludovic Attiogbe remembers well his baptism into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He was among the first to be baptized in the Church in Togo. At that time he did not understand much about religion. Before joining the Church, Ludovic did not like going to church very much. Some churches were not interesting; others were too noisy. Whatever the reason, Ludovic felt out of place.

Ludovic's father, Dieudonne Mawuena Kokou Attiogbe, joined the Church in England while working for the Embassy of Togo in London. When he returned to Togo, he missed the Church a lot. With work, the Church began to grow. Ludovic recalls that in the early days things were difficult. The people in his neighborhood thought that his father had returned from England to establish a church in order to make money. That was a subject of mockery. Every Sunday Ludovic helped his father by carrying stools to their place of worship. He felt it was very difficult and recalls, "I don't know where I found the strength to bear it." But he loved this Church "because I felt in my place."

Ludovic was baptized on September 20, 1997, in Le Benin Hotel's pool. "At first it was awkward," he explains. "The hotel guests did not tolerate our presence in the pool. With the help of the hotel supervisor, the attitude of the guests changed. The Spirit was felt and the service ended successfully."

Ludovic had never played the piano, but he had a natural gift for music. His father brought back a small toy piano for him from England and he was able to accompany the music on Sundays with his little piano. He would listen to the CD once and then he could play the hymn. Sometimes he would even conduct the hymns. Later, when the first missionary couple came, Elder and Sister Findley, Ludovic took music lessons. Finally, he began to read the notes.

Shortly after his baptism, his father told him that he was going to receive the priesthood. Although Ludovic did not know much about the priesthood, he felt something strong as his father spoke. Ludovic wondered if he would have to dress like the Catholic priests, but his father said no.

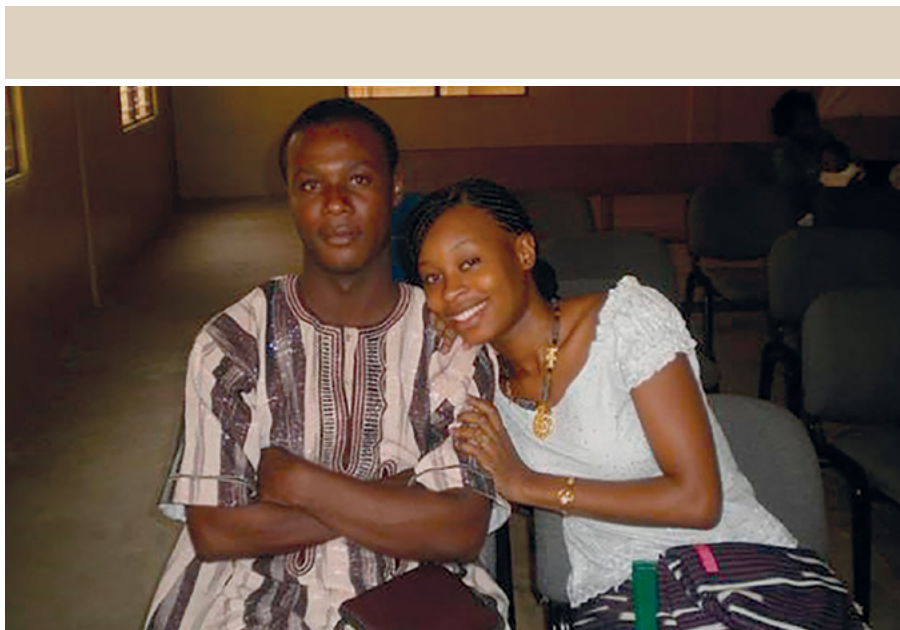
One day Ludovic came across the first verse of the Section 13 of the Doctrine and Covenants that read: "Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels . . ." He felt something that was unique.

He realized that he was another very important person in the work of our Heavenly Father. He should try to serve just as John the Baptist and the Prophet Joseph Smith had served to build up God's kingdom on earth. He was ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood as a teacher on November 8, 1998, by his father. When he received this priesthood, he realized that he had something stronger than other kids his age. Even grown-ups he knew did not have this power, so he committed to always protect it.

Ludovic began reading the scriptures faithfully. He began with the Pearl of Great Price because, he explains, "I found some really

amazing things in that book." Ludovic is grateful that throughout his life he has seen the power of the priesthood manifested in his life. He declares, "The Church is absolutely true."

When Ludovic grew up, he served a full-time mission. Teaching about the Restoration of the Church, he realized the importance of the First Vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He testified of the truth of this to many people. Some believed and some did not. He testified of the power that can be accessed through coming to Christ and receiving the holy priesthood. During his mission, he felt the hand of God protecting him. He felt the presence of the Savior in his life. It was a wonderful



Ludovic and his wife Bénédicte

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and a very strong experience for him, even though it was not without challenges.

He was originally assigned to the mission in Zimbabwe but was unable to get his visa. After being reassigned to Côte d'Ivoire, he left for the missionary training center in August of 2009. His mother was traveling at the time he needed to leave for his mission. It was a tender mercy that she returned home just in time to say good-bye to her son. He did not know that it would be the last time he would see his mother. She passed away when Ludovic had been on his mission for only seven months. It was a very difficult time for him. Another challenge occurred after one year on his mission. The war in Côte d'Ivoire began, and Ludovic was sent to Benin to finish his mission. He returned from his mission in August of 2011. After returning from his mission, he married Benedicte Kakou.

Ludovic bears a strong testimony: “This Church is true and only God could grant such a mighty power which is the priesthood. I know that Joseph Smith is the prophet of the Restoration. And thanks to his courage and especially his perseverance, the last dispensation is open and we have these blessings. I pray with all my heart that my brothers and sisters around the world can find the path that lead us back to our Heavenly Father.” ■

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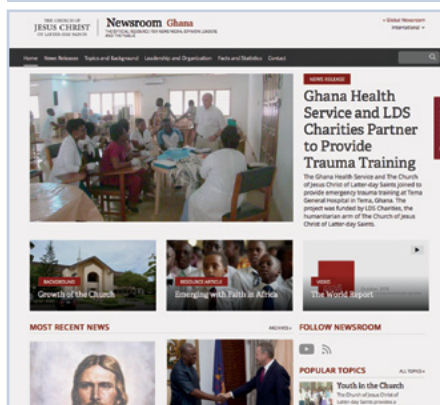
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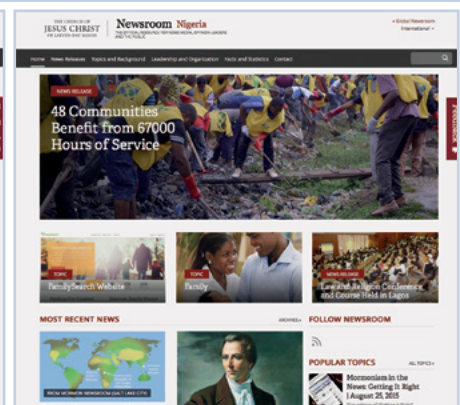
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