

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Moral Agency: A Precious Gift

By Elder Marcus B. Nash

First Counselor, Africa West Area Presidency



Elder Marcus B. Nash

Moral agency is essential to the plan of salvation

Each of us a beloved son or daughter of Heavenly Parents¹ and lived with them prior to coming to earth. Our Heavenly Father wanted to give us the opportunity to become like Him and instituted His plan so that we could receive immortality and eternal life.² Eternal life is God's life, the greatest of all the gifts of God.³ Our Heavenly Father's plan is the only way that we can become like Him and receive all that He has.⁴

Our moral agency is essential to fulfill the purpose of His plan. Agency is our God-given capacity to choose to act

and not be acted upon.⁵ It is the power to act according to the eternal truths and law that make God what He is and heaven what it is—and to be happy.⁶ It is also the power to reject God and His laws—and to be miserable.⁷ Agency has its risks: it can produce great good, and it can also produce misery.

When the Father's plan was presented in the premortal realm, most of His children accepted it and shouted for joy.⁸ Others rejected the plan. This led a war of right against wrong, good against evil.⁹ This war was in part over the gift of agency. Our agency is so important that our Heavenly Father permitted us to make the choice of

whether or not to support His great plan of happiness.¹⁰

Satan wanted power over everyone and everything, so he rejected the plan and sought to destroy the agency of man.¹¹ He claimed that not one soul would be lost.¹² This was a lie, because every one of our Father's children would surely have been lost forever without the gift of agency.¹³ This is because it is impossible to return to the presence of Heavenly Father, receive eternal life, and become like Him without experiencing the growth that can only result from making the choice to follow Him and His laws. It is by making and carrying out righteous decisions that we grow. Our agency is essential and necessary to develop the divine potential within us.

Opposition gives us the opportunity to choose to grow or diminish

Because you and I supported the plan, we were allowed to come to this earth to be tested and to grow.¹⁴ Thus, we should not be surprised or dismayed when we encounter opposition, for opposition enables our agency. Opposition gives us the opportunity to grow by making a gospel-centered choice. So, think of



opposition as opportunity: opportunity to exercise our agency with faith in the Lord and to grow closer to God:

“For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness, nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility. . . .

“ . . . There is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon. . . .

“Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself” (2 Nephi 2:11, 14, 16).

This God-given power to choose the right can be strengthened or diminished by the choices we make. This is because those who choose to be governed by the law of the Lord will be “preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same” (D&C 88:34). Those who break the law of the Lord and choose to not be governed by His law “cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still” (D&C 88:35). In short, those who choose to be governed by His law and

commandments will grow to become like Him. Those who choose not to be governed by His law will diminish and remain filthy.

I recently heard a missionary in the Ghana Accra Missionary Training Center share a story from his childhood. When he was about nine years old, he and a group of his friends came to the market and saw someone selling groundnuts. He and his friends were hungry. So, they decided to walk, one at a time, by the place where the man was selling groundnuts and take some while he was not looking. The missionary watched his friends, one by one, walk by the groundnuts and put some into their pockets without paying for them. When it was his turn,

Our Heavenly Father's plan is the only way that we can become like Him and receive all that He has.

he heard a voice speak in his mind: “You should not do this. It is wrong.” He looked around and did not see anyone, so he walked over to the mound of groundnuts, only to hear the Spirit again say: “You should not do this. It is wrong.” He decided to not take any groundnuts; instead, he just walked away. When his friends asked him why he did not take any, he repeated what the voice had told him: it was wrong.

By choosing that day to listen to the Holy Ghost and follow the law of the Lord as a boy, he grew closer to God and became a little more like the Lord. In contrast, his friends were diminished by their unrighteous choice and distanced themselves from God. The only way to grow, draw close to God, and increase our capacity is to choose to follow Him and His laws and to repent when we have made a wrong choice.

If we do not quickly repent, one wrong choice usually leads to another, and those who walk that path gradually diminish their desire and capacity to choose the right and distance themselves from God and His power. Happily, the converse is true: one good choice often leads to another, drawing us closer to God and His power. Because the missionary chose as a boy to not take the groundnuts, it led to other good choices. As he made one good choice after another, he continued to grow through the years



step by step, here little, there a little, until he was prepared to become a strong missionary.

Exercising our agency with faith in Christ gives us hope

Exercising our agency with faith in Christ brings us hope, the expectation of good things to come. While God will not force our agency, He encourages us to exercise our agency to follow the teachings and example of His Son. If we choose to follow the Savior, we can do so with the confidence, even the expectation, that He will give us power far beyond our own to overcome our difficulties, become like Him, and be raised unto life eternal. We can choose to fulfill our divine destiny.

A short history will illustrate this point: Isaac of Ghana returned honorably from his full-time mission with the desire to continue on the covenant path, and he knew that meant finding a young woman to whom he could be sealed in the temple. He came to know Edema, a wonderful returned missionary from Nigeria. The two fell in love and wanted to be sealed in the Ghana Accra Temple. Isaac did not have a job, and Edema's extended family presented a list. Isaac's parents were both deceased, and his uncle forbade him from getting married, telling him that he was crazy to think of marriage when he did not even have a job. Isaac prayed about what



The only way to grow, draw close to God, and increase our capacity is to choose to follow Him and His laws and to repent when we have made a wrong choice.

to do and heard these words spoken to his mind: “You should not fear man more than God.” So, he went to his uncle and told him that he respected him, but that he respected God more and would put God first. So, he and Edema decided to be sealed and set the date. Then, miracles began to happen. Isaac was offered a job. With the help of Edema's mother, they did not need to be concerned about the list. They were sealed in the temple and are happy in their marriage.

In this short history, we see that Isaac and Edema faced strong opposition and difficult trials. Because they had decided to put God first, the opposition they faced became an opportunity to choose the right. Once they moved forward in faith, they had hope, the expectation of good things to come; the miracles followed.

Agency means that we are responsible for our choices

The principle of agency means that we are 100 percent responsible and accountable for our choices and actions—we cannot blame others or our circumstances for our decisions and the consequences of our choices. Each person has the opportunity in this life to “act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment” (D&C 101:78). With the opportunity to choose comes the accountability for our decisions and actions.

This connection between choice and accountability means that how we exercise our agency will shape our souls for eternity:

“And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free.

“He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you” (Helaman 14:30–31).



Our Heavenly Father has given us the opportunity to grow through the wise use of our agency. The growth will come only to the degree we choose of our free will to do good.

a commandment that you should do better at living: do you obey the law to search the scriptures? Do you read the Book of Mormon daily? If your answer is no, you might offer the excuse that you have to study or work too many hours or that you are so busy that you do not have time. Remember, you are not an object to be acted upon, but you can act for yourself. So, decide when you will read the Book of Mormon every day, and do it!

Do you live the law of tithing? If your answer is no, you may offer the excuse that you do not have enough money to pay a full tithe. Remember, you are not controlled by your circumstances or opposition unless you choose to be. You do not lack the money to pay tithing; what you lack at the moment is sufficient faith. So, decide to exercise whatever particle of faith you have to pay a full tithe, and do it.

In other words, we become what we choose to become. We are our own judges¹⁵; we are responsible for our choices. If we do evil, evil will be restored to us unless we repent. If we do good, good will be restored to us.¹⁶ We can act for ourselves and are accountable for the consequences of our choices!

We can choose to repent

If we have made wrong decisions, we can choose to repent, to change, and be cleansed and forgiven. We must remember that as part of His plan, our Heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus Christ to earth to save us from death and sin. The Savior chose to fulfill His mission and submit to the will of

If we have made wrong decisions, we can choose to repent, to change, and be cleansed and forgiven.



the Father, even when it was terribly difficult.¹⁷ By exercising His agency to atone for our sins and die and be resurrected, He has given us hope, light, joy, and the possibility of eternal life. Because of His good choices, He pleased our Father in Heaven and has been given all power in heaven and earth “to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 12:15; see also Alma 34:15–17). We can choose to repent and be saved by Him.

Use your agency wisely—great blessings await!

Our Heavenly Father has given us the opportunity to grow through the wise use of our agency. The growth will come only to the degree we choose of our free will to do good. For this reason, the Lord desires that His children be “anxiously engaged in a good cause, and *do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness*;

“For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward” (D&C 58:27–28; emphasis added). Let’s not waste this one-in-an-eternity chance to choose the better part and receive all that the Father has offered—which is all He has!¹⁸

I invite you to choose to put the Lord first and more fully live the gospel. Making that choice will transform your soul for the better. Choose

LOCAL NEWS

By choosing to obey these laws—or any law or commandment of God—you will experience growth of character and increased faith. The Holy Ghost will be your companion, teacher, and guide.

Our Heavenly Father loves us, for we are His children. The precious gift of agency is the power to choose for ourselves and is essential to our growth. Let us use this precious and essential gift to draw His strength and power into our lives¹⁹ to grow, progress, and become like Him. ■

NOTES

1. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.
2. See Robert D. Hales, “The Plan of Salvation: A Sacred Treasure of Knowledge to Guide Us,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Oct. 2015, 32–39.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
5. See 2 Nephi 2:14–16.
6. See George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Two Volumes in One: Discourses and Writings of George Q. Cannon*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist (1974), 296.
7. See 2 Nephi 2:27.
8. See Job 38:7.
9. See Revelation 12:7–9.
10. Each choice had clear consequences: those who supported the Father and His plan were given the opportunity to come to earth, receive a body, be tested and proven, and gain the experience and learning necessary to inherit eternal life. Those who rebelled forfeited their chance to participate in the Father’s plan and lost their divine destiny. And they continue their war of rebellion against God, seeking to turn the minds and hearts of humankind against Him.
11. See Moses 4:3–4.
12. See Moses 4:1.
13. See 2 Nephi 2:11–13.
14. See Abraham 3:24–26.
15. See Alma 41:7.
16. See Alma 41.
17. See Luke 22:39–46.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
19. See Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Liahona*, May 2017, 39–42.

The Home Enrichment Program: A Means by Which God Blesses His Children

By Bishop Ekong Edet Inyang

Ugbighoko Ward, Uzebu Benin Nigeria Stake



Since its inception, the Relief Society has prepared Latter-day Saint women for blessings of eternal life by increasing faith, strengthening families and homes, and providing relief by helping those in need. One of the ways to accomplish this is through the home enrichment program. The essence of this program is to increase skills and the production of home basic needs by educating and fortifying the sisters to become self-reliant.

On March 24, 2018, the Ugbighoko Ward Relief Society sisters did something extraordinary. The sisters convened to learn home enrichment skills. The sisters were taught how to make shower gel and toilet cleaning liquid. The Relief Society president, Loretta Olaye, taught the sisters prior that “homemaking” enables the family to economize and save money in their budget. She also taught that with homemaking, the sisters could learn to be self-reliant by acquiring

home enrichment skills to better their lives. She reiterated that with these skills, every Latter-day Saint sister is enabled to contribute to the support of her family. She also testified that this will grant the sisters greater self-confidence.

These sisters learned the principles of temporary self-reliance by finding solutions to short-term and long-term welfare needs. After the discussion, the sisters experimented on the lesson taught. As the bishop, I was overwhelmed by the faith of the sisters in learning these skills. As I watched the

sisters engaged in mixing the ingredients for the production of the shower gel and toilet cleaning liquid, I could see the faith of their hearts in action. They experimented in the process, not knowing what it may turn out to be. It strengthened my faith in the Savior as the sisters looked to their leader and obtained the desired result. We too may have an expected end of dwelling with God in the eternities, if we focus on Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith.

The Ugbighoko Ward sisters also engaged in other home enrichment

skills such as baking of pastries, production of hand sanitizers, and decoration of vests. As a leader, I feel a sincere desire to help these sisters develop a self-reliance plan through more training on home-making skills. Through my calling as a bishop, I have come to understand that when members become self-reliant, they are better able to serve one another and to care for those that stand in need. May we in our very little way assist in the course of Zion, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Master, amen. ■

LATTER-DAY VOICES

Blessed by Keeping the Sabbath Day Holy

By **Augustine Amankwah**

Nkawkaw Branch 2, Nkawkaw District

As a junior high school teacher with eight children, I needed to provide at least GHC 5.00 as pocket money to each child every school day. None of the days were for rest in my family, including Sundays. My wife needed to work hard with the children to make ends meet. She sold mashed kenkey (ice kenkey), water, cocoa drinks, or farm produce I brought from the farm I owned aside my teaching job.

After my family's baptism, the missionaries taught us the importance

of Sabbath day observance. We found it difficult and inconvenient to observe the Sabbath due to the high financial challenges we faced. The missionaries taught us to our understanding from scriptures such as Mosiah 13:16–19 and Exodus 20:8–11. Reading such scriptures overturned events of the family. We prayed for the Lord to help us keep His day holy by providing for our needs from Monday to Saturday.

While offering a prayer in our family home evening one Monday,

I declared that henceforth there should be no more sales on Sundays. My children jubilated with the hope that Heavenly Father would provide. The Lord indeed answered my prayers. Each of these children have now completed various levels in their education, and four of them are returned missionaries with university education.

Thus, the Savior will bless His people who obey and keep the Sabbath day holy. ■

MISSIONARY MOMENTS

Safety Hat to Name Tag

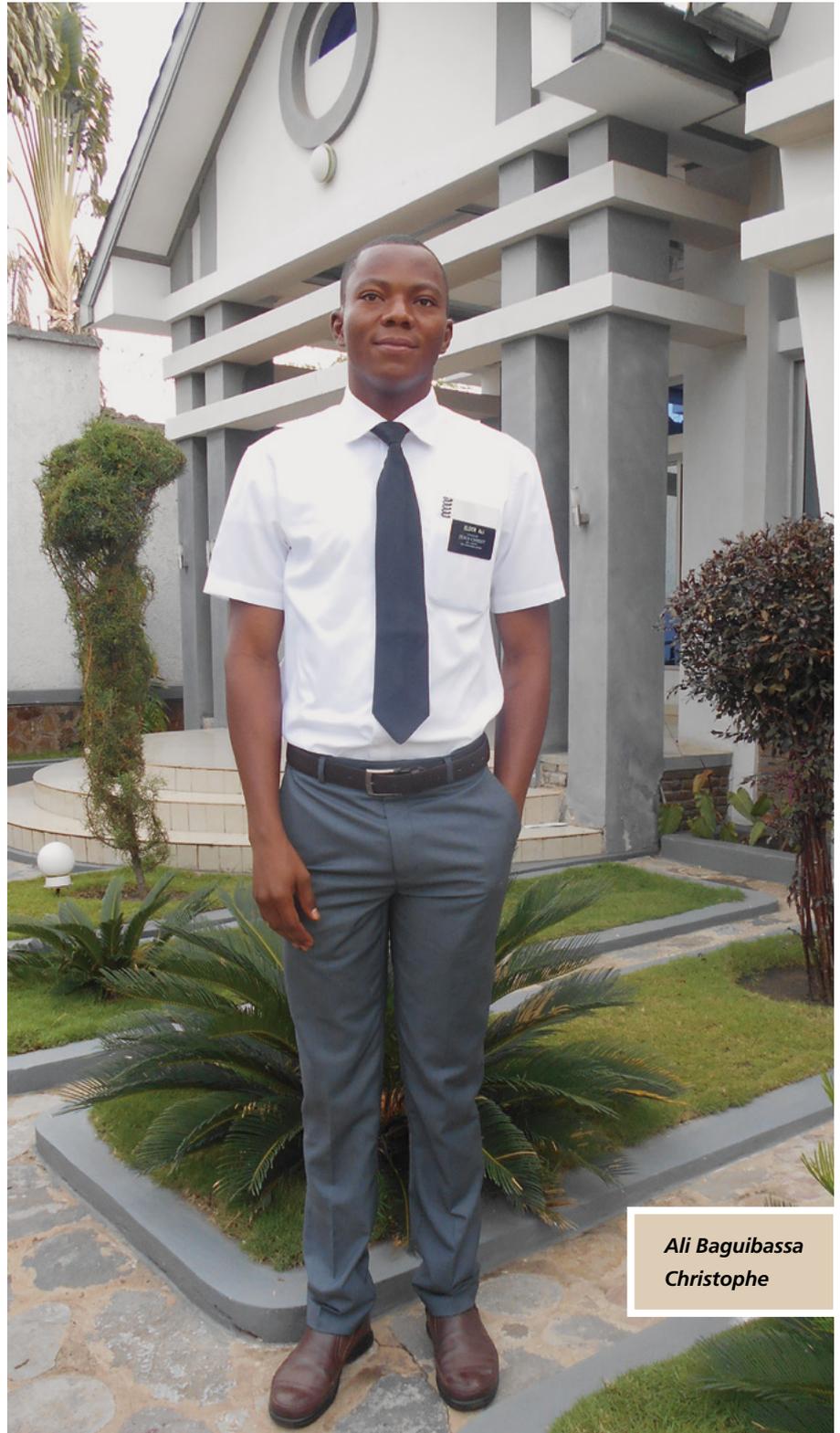
By **Ali Baguibassa Christophe**

Wuiti Ward, Lomé Togo Stake

It was a Tuesday afternoon in June while I was on internship with a civil engineering company in Lomé. I lived with my uncle and went to work every day, but one day I stayed at home because there was no work on that day. While I was in the kitchen preparing a meal for myself at noon, I heard someone ring the doorbell, but I could not leave my omelette on the gas cooker because I might come back to find it burnt; the person rang the bell a couple more times, and then I assumed whoever it was had left. Five minutes later, it rang again, and I went to open it.

I saw two brothers neatly dressed in white shirts, ties, and name tags. I welcomed them into the house and apologized for the delay. They offered to help with the task I was engaged in. I usually do not welcome preachers, but that day, after opening the door, my mind was at ease.

The young missionaries introduced themselves, shared their message, and left me a booklet on the Restoration and a Book of Mormon, encouraging me to read it, meditate, and pray over it. They also shared their testimonies. After their departure, I locked myself up in my room and did exactly what they told me to, not knowing what



*Ali Baguibassa
Christophe*

was driving me. I spent all day reading and at about 6:00 p.m. that day, I called to book an appointment.

The next day, I had several questions for them to answer but after

offering the prayer, my heart was at peace. I quit my internship to listen to their message three times a week for three weeks, and I was baptized in a new branch in my neighborhood.

After my baptism, I had a lot of victimization in my neighborhood and family. There were false testimonies and all sorts of mockeries, but I endured. Two weeks after my baptism, I left for north Togo to continue my studies. Though the Church wasn't there, nothing could prevent me from obeying the principles and reading the Book of Mormon every day. The missionaries called often to find out how I was doing, and that comforted me.

After completing school, I decided to stay in Lomé to be closer to Church members and pursue a university degree in civil engineering. After a couple of years, I deferred my studies to serve a full-time mission. On June 23, 2016, I was called to serve in a newly created mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mbuji-Mayi. Today I am a missionary and, in a few months, I will finish my mission with honor.

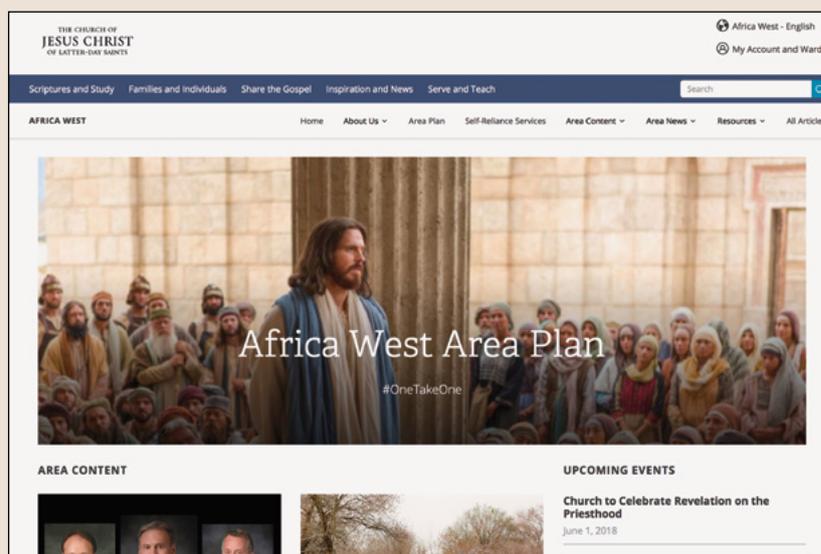
I have learned a lot from the Church and by the daily reading of the Book of Mormon, which is the keystone of our religion. Although weak, I have been shaped by the Lord to bring souls to Him, and I rejoice in this privilege that He has granted me to fulfill this sacred duty of the priesthood.

Criticisms from our neighbors and family should not make us leave the Church. I know that Jesus Christ lives, that He has reestablished His Church through the Prophet Joseph Smith,

and that this Church has the same organization as that of the primitive Church. We are created in the image

of our Heavenly Father, and I share this in the precious name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

VISIT AREA WEBSITES!



Africa West Area Websites:
 English: africawest.lds.org
 French: afriquedelouest.lds.org

Mormon Newsroom Ghana:
www.mormonnewsroom.com.gh
 Mormon Newsroom Nigeria:
www.mormonnewsroom.org.ng ■

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Your local pages section is produced by members in your own area under the guidance of the Area Presidency so that it can address the needs and experiences of members where you live. The inclusion of the local pages in each issue depends on the availability of local content. We invite you to contribute your faith-promoting thoughts and experiences by contacting your local editor:

AfricaWestWebsite@ldschurch.org ■