

**This young adult from Ghana knows that even when life seems hopeless, you can always rely on Heavenly Father.**



# How Eric Learned to Trust God

**By Richard M. Romney**

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**W**hen 21-year-old Eric Ayala of Techiman, Ghana, was 3, he and his mother were at a street-side market when a car veered out of control and struck them.

Now paraplegic, Eric faced challenge after challenge as he grew up without the use of his legs. He eventually obtained leg braces that allowed him to stand, but he soon outgrew them and couldn't afford replacements. He was given a small wheelchair, but outgrew that too. His legs withered, sometimes shaking with spasms, and his feet became deformed.

In Ghana, those with disabilities are often considered a burden. Eric's family had little money, not enough to pay for medical treatment. When Eric was about 10, he developed pressure sores caused by lack of movement and by sitting on wood and concrete. The sores festered, oozing constantly, and they smelled terrible.



As a result, Eric lived outside, on a bench in an open-air shed. His mother, Lucy, and his sisters brought him food, washed his clothes, and helped him bathe. Eric was often drenched by rain and shivered from cold in the night. He learned to love morning sunshine because it brought warmth. Too poor to go to school and unable to work, he spent years in that shed, occasionally venturing into the neighborhood on his wheelchair.

### **The Beginning of Belief**

Rather than becoming resentful, “I started to love and believe in God,” Eric says. “Nobody taught me about Him, but I could see His creations, and I could see the good and bad in people. Sometimes it is hard to believe in Him when life is hard. But then I would see something good come into my life, and I would say, ‘See, God is here, and it is wonderful.’”



Eric had not been formally taught how to pray, but he began calling upon God. He received answers—when he was sick, an unanticipated opportunity to see a doctor; when he asked for relief from his sores, they went away; when he outgrew his small wheelchair, a kind stranger brought him a larger one. “God did many good things in my life,” he says.

Then, in what seemed a miracle, at age 14, Eric was accepted for school. His mother, by cooking for others, had scraped together enough money to buy him a uniform and pay for books and tuition. At school, “I couldn’t go out and exercise with the others,” he explains, “so I stayed inside and studied all the time.” He amazed his headmaster by receiving top scores in math, reading, and writing.

A nun from the hospital donated a new tricycle that Eric could pedal with his hands, making it easier for him to go to school. But as Eric went back and forth, pressure sores opened again. Infection returned, along with the putrid smell as the wounds leaked. Students complained about flies constantly buzzing around Eric. He was 17 when the headmaster told him to go home and get well, or he could not return to school.

Eric’s father had a tiny farm out in the country. He had taken the family to work on the farm, but Eric

remained at home in his shed, alone. Meanwhile, his sores enlarged to huge wounds and infection entered into his bones, a life-threatening condition called osteomyelitis.

### **Talking with an Obruni**

When he was 18, Eric saw his friend Emmanuel Ofosu-hene speaking English with an *obruni* (white man). The *obruni* was a Mormon missionary, Elder Old. “I only spoke Twi, but Emmanuel interpreted for me: ‘I am so sick I think I will die. Can you help me know what to do so I can go to heaven?’

“Elder Old and his African companion sat with me and taught me. For some reason, they started with the Word of Wisdom. I knew they were speaking the truth because I already knew coffee and tobacco were bad.” They also gave Eric a brochure about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and invited him to church.

“When I went, I saw this Church was different,” he says. “It was reverent.” Even though it took him an hour to push himself to church in his wheelchair, Eric loved the meetings. “I wanted to go up front and be with people,” he says. “But I stayed at the back because I knew I smelled bad.”

Eric told the missionaries, “What I am learning is true.” He also told

them he wanted to be baptized, but doctors had warned him not to get his wounds wet. “I will rely on God to provide answers,” he said. He attended church for about a year and then became too ill and weak to wheel himself there.

Eventually, Eric was taken to the hospital again. In Ghana, patients have to provide their own water, food, bedding, medicine, and bandages. If they have no money, they are not treated. Eric’s mother and sisters did what they could. Eric received food and medical attention infrequently, so he grew weaker.

### **An Unexpected Visit**

Then Eric received some unexpected visitors. Missionaries, Sister Peprah and Sister Nafuna, had seen his photograph at the church and came to see him in the hospital and brought him food. It had been a year since he had been to church, but he told them he still wanted to be baptized.

A few days later, Eric’s sister visited him and found him very ill. She ran home and told their mother. Though their mother had suffered permanent leg damage in the accident with Eric, she walked to the hospital, wincing with every step. “You must come home,” she told Eric. “If you’re going to die, I at least want you near.”

The next morning, the sister

missionaries came to the house. “You weren’t at the hospital,” Sister Peprah said. “So we came here.” With them were Elder and Sister Wood, senior missionaries from New Zealand. They took inventory of needs and promised to return.

A few days later, Eric’s father took the family back to the farm—except Eric, who found himself alone again and without food or water. When Elder and Sister Wood returned and discovered Eric alone and hungry, they brought him food and water. They returned the next day and noticed fluid running down his leg and found a huge open ulcer on his thigh. They immediately took Eric back to the hospital.

The Woods learned of a medical humanitarian team from the United States that would be coming to Ghana. The team would perform surgery for Eric without cost. The surgeon treated the ulcer on Eric’s leg. But when he saw the severity of Eric’s wounds, as well as the osteomyelitis, he determined he could not do all the necessary procedures in Ghana. Based on his recommendation, the humanitarian organization initiated a process that would eventually bring Eric to the United States to receive additional treatment and permanently close his wounds. In addition, a shelter in Winneba, Ghana, run by members of the Church, agreed to have Eric live there when he returned so that he could attend school and complete his education.

### **The Lord Provided**

Elder Wood, an engineer by profession, rebuilt Eric’s hand-pedal tricycle. He performed a similar overhaul on his wheelchair. He also counseled with President Cosgrave of the Ghana Kumasi Mission, a medical doctor. They felt Eric could be baptized if proper precautions were taken.

“Elder Wood wrapped my body in plastic, with tape around the plastic,” Eric explains. “Then he carried me into a font filled with water treated with disinfectant.

I was baptized on June 26, 2016.” Eric had relied on the Lord, and the Lord had provided a way. ■

