When Stephen Manortey came to the United States to attend Brigham Young University, he knew he wasn’t here to stay.

Manortey, who grew up in rural Ghana and knows intimately the struggles his fellow Ghanaians face, always intended to return home to use his education to help lift the lives of others.

“I feel that when I’m done, I must not stay here to work, but I have to go back immediately to help,” he said.

This desire to help others stems from his own experiences. After high school, Manortey wanted to further his education, but his family couldn’t afford to send him to a university. Instead, Manortey attended Ada College of Education to learn to teach social studies. After his graduation in 1991, he went to work at a rural junior high school in the Eastern Region, Ghana. When he arrived, Manortey discovered that the school’s greatest need was not a social studies teacher, but a mathematics teacher. He immediately went to work.

“I just went to buy books and started reading to learn to teach. That sparked my interest and love for the subject,” Manortey said.

After five years of teaching junior high, he decided to return to school himself.

Manortey graduated from the University of Ghana with a bachelor’s degree in statistics in 1999. For the next eight years he taught high school mathematics, but still didn’t feel that he was done learning. At the encouragement of his wife, Christiana, Manortey applied to Brigham Young University to study statistics at the graduate level.

The remote area of Ghana where Manortey and his family lived in those days had no Internet access, so each week Manortey traveled two hours to the nearest town, which had an Internet café, to see if there was any news from BYU. Week after week, he heard nothing. Frustrated and discouraged, he wanted to give up.

“I’m always grateful for the inspiration from my wife,” Manortey said. “She told me, ‘Stephen, you need to continue looking at this.’ ‘Well, I’ll travel to this café for the last time,’ I told her, ‘and if I go and don’t get any feedback, I’ll call it quits.’”

Luckily, that one last time was the time BYU responded—with a letter of acceptance and a full-ride scholarship.

The Manorteys had to sell many of their possessions to afford the plane tickets to travel to the United States, but money was not their largest obstacle. Because of visa complications, their son, Elias, stayed in Ghana with his grandparents until the Manorteys could get permission to bring him to the States, a process that would take over three years.

Following his graduation from BYU in 2006, Manortey took a job working as a market research analyst for a Salt Lake City based company. He soon realized however, that his true desire was to use his education to benefit the lives of those he left behind in Ghana. With the usual encouragement from his wife, Manortey applied to the University of Utah School of Medicine to study public health with a focus in biostatistics and analysis of spatial data.

His desire to use his education to help others led to opportunities for Manortey to do so, even while he was still in his doctoral work. Through collaboration with a local university and teaching hospital in Ghana, Manortey was able to co-direct an annual study abroad program for graduate and medical students to conduct research and help address health challenges in rural communities in Ghana.

Manortey received his PhD from the University of Utah in May of 2013 and worked as a postdoc research fellow in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of Utah in several capacities, including serving as a study coordinator and data analyst for a longitudinal multiple micronutrient supplement research project on reproductive-aged women in rural Ghana. He then accepted a job offer in Ghana where he will teach, starting September 2014, at Ensign College of Public Health and continue his research to help improve the quality of life in West Africa.

The opportunity to study at BYU was what Manortey calls “the beginning of many miracles.” Through these miracles, Manortey was able to receive the blessings of education, a blessing he intends to spend his life passing on to others.
Stephen Manortey (pictured right) with his wife, Christiana, and his son, Elias.