



The Prescribed Life

Devotional by
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*"He is not impressed by the strength of a horse; He does not value the power of a warrior. The Lord values those who hear him, those who put their hope in His faithful love."
—Psalm 147:10-11*

Recently I've been thinking about my relationship with God, and I was wondering if He finds pleasure in me. As a missionary the temptation is to immediately think, 'well I'm doing God's work in Haiti so of course God looks upon me with pleasure.' This, though, is the wrong way to think ("He is not impressed by the strength of a horse; He does not value the power of a warrior."), and I want to use this devotional to correct our thinking when it comes to our relationship with God in terms of the pleasure He finds in us and the pleasure we find in Him.

In the above passage written by king David we see that God is not impressed by human parameters of greatness (strength, power, wealth, etc.), but that He solely values those who hear Him and place ALL their hope in Him. We can appreciate this further through the words of Isaiah, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at My word." (Isaiah 66:2b).

If we want God to find pleasure in us we must not think highly of ourselves (humility), we must submit the entirety of ourselves to

Him, and we must be fearfully respectful of His word! So we see that God's delight in us has nothing to do with us but everything to do with Him. Let us now consider another Biblical fact that will aid us in this discussion. In the Bible we find that God commands us to find pleasure in Him:

*"Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let those who love your salvation continually say, 'God is great!'"
—Psalm 70:4*

A commentary that I was reading pointed out an interesting truth found in this psalm. We all, as Christians, surely love and cherish our salvation. What though, should the love for our salvation lead us to say? Rather than intuitively saying "the salvation God has given us is great", the verse instructs us to simply say "God is great!"—salvation does not receive the praise—God does! Let's consider another verse:

*"Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you your heart's desires."
— Psalm 37:4*

Once again, when we receive the desires of our hearts what should we delight in? As the verse reveals, we are not to take delight in the desires that God has given us, but rather

we are to take delight in God, and God alone. The message here is clear. God delights in us to the degree that we delight in Him. We shouldn't praise God for what He has given us—we are to praise Him for being who He is, which is a higher form of praise.

God's pleasure in us does not result from anything we have done or will do, but rather arises from our pleasure in Him. As humans we must crucify our flesh, and this is the reason why. As long as our flesh and its inherent worldliness lives, we will erroneously think that our pious actions, our charisma, our good speaking skills, etc., can earn us God's pleasure, but nothing could be further from the truth.

*"The God who made the world and everything in it—He is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things."
—Acts 17:24-25*

God needs nothing from us and is not impressed with anything we do because He does not see us from a vantage point involving our merit—because we have none! When God looks at us He sees His perfect Son, Jesus, and this is how we are redeemed and made righteous. So God wants our pleasure to be only in Him—not what He gives us—because only He has made our salvation possible. When you find all of your pleasure in God, He will find pleasure in you!

*"Only fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things He has done for you."
— 1 Samuel 12:24*

Charis Family,

It is my hope and prayer that you are greatly encouraged and challenged by this newsletter that shares current updates in Haiti and highlights a man who is an integral and beloved part of Charis on the Haitian side—Pastor Denervil Abony. Thank you all for your continued support via prayer and donations—we are all part of this ministry that God has so graciously given to us to perform. As we look ahead to 2019 we are excited about continuing forward with all of you as we anticipate another year of blessing, salvation, and spiritual victory in Haiti!



Haiti Update

New church now holding services!

We have great news from the outskirts of Jacmel—our new church has finally opened! Construction, as most things in Haiti, took a lot longer to complete than originally projected, but God's timing is perfect and the church opened its doors on Sunday September 23rd! The inaugural service had 70 people in attendance, and that number has been growing weekly.



The first service in the new church building in Jacmel.

This church body is very unique demographically. Everyone in attendance at the initial service had come to Christ out of vodou! Vodou priests, vodou priestesses, malefactors, and vodouisants, (those who practice vodou as their religion), who had been chosen by God for salvation and had responded to the gospel, filled the seats of the church. Their great joy was evident in the passion with which they worshiped, and their attentiveness to the preaching revealed an eagerness that was both refreshing and encouraging to observe.

They completely understand that their life sentences to an eternal prison have been overturned and their crimes pardoned by their Savior—Jesus Christ. The gospel offers true and complete emancipation that doesn't just free the body from bondage, but also liberates the soul, and thus the entire person is now free! This is something to truly celebrate! This should greatly encourage all of you as it has us. This is the fruit of the labor—saved souls with an eternal existence in heaven to now look forward to!

This is why we go, this is why we pray, and this is why we give/support, because unlike the world's temporal offerings that exist as transient distractions, this ministry is offering eternal liberation from sin, bondage, and self through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. This great gift exists as an enduring, perpetual reality that carries over from this life into the next—truly the gift that keeps on giving! So let us appreciate the gravity of what we are ALL participating in here and let's celebrate this victory over Satan together!

Return to vodou

After we returned to the States, we received an urgent message from Deba, (the vodou priestess who was the first convert in this area of Jacmel who, after her salvation, immediately began to evangelize her family and village to the point that nearly everyone sitting in the church at the inaugural service was there as a result of her impassioned and anointed evangelism).

She was very upset because her father, Ofranes, and her cousin, Gina, had turned back to serving the demon. Many months ago Deba's aunt, who had claimed conversion to Christ, had completely returned to vodou as a result of financial hardship. Deba and many members of her family all share and live on the same piece of land. Now Deba's aunt, who lives on the land too, began having vodou ceremonies on this property.



Deba's cousin, Gina.

This caused a problem because everyone else in the family was saved, and this property that had been dedicated to God by myself and others, was now being spiritually defiled. As I have written previously, when a vodouist surrenders their life to Christ it comes at a great financial and social cost. The money that was made through providing spiritual services, and the prestige attained within the community served is now all gone. This leaves the vodou priest broke and socially shunned.

In response to this Joy and I make ourselves continually available to teach, pray, and if necessary financially support these new Christians in their trials and sufferings to help them resist the continual temptation to return to the demons. As Deba's aunt was performing ceremonies and re-establishing herself as a working vodou priestess, the money she was bringing in along with the community's admiration became a powerful stumbling block to Deba's father and aunt who were struggling to buy food and provide for themselves and their families—as a result they returned to vodou. This horrified Deba, and she called us not knowing what to do.

Time to fast and pray

Joy and I told her that we all needed to begin to fast and pray—which we all did. We also called pastor Abony (our lead Haitian pastor who has worked closely with us for 5 years) and told him to go sit with Ofranes and Gina to determine if this is what they truly wanted to do. To make a long story short, pastor Abony went to them armed by our prayers,

and spoke with them. They said that things were very hard and they needed money so, in desperation, they performed a couple of ceremonies. Pastor Abony explained to them that this is not permissible for one who is born again as we no longer place our faith within ourselves, spirits, or the world for our care. We have surrendered our complete selves into the arms of Christ and thus when things get difficult we turn only to Him in prayer, not the demons.

He then explained that Christ promises to care for our basic needs if we just cry out to Him (Matthew 6:25-34). As they listened both Ofranes and Gina had their hearts wrenched and they began to cry tears of repentance. Ashamed, they promised never to return to the demons again, and going forward they would 'walk with the church' and turn only to God for their needs.

Can you lose your salvation?

Deba's aunt continues to have a hardened heart though, and she continues to defiantly practice vodou on the property. This brings up a quick point that I would like to make about losing your salvation. It would appear that Deba's aunt has lost her salvation. She had claimed to be saved, and then only a couple months later turned back to Satan. There are two sections of Scripture that will help us understand this.

First, if one is truly saved they **cannot** lose their salvation as shown through the words of Jesus.

“My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”
—John 10:27-29

You may ask, in response to this verse, 'well, then who snatched Deba's aunt out of Christ's hand?'. The obvious answer would be Satan, but does Satan have this kind of power? Absolutely not, as clearly stated in Scripture,

“We know [with confidence] that anyone born of God does not habitually sin; but He (Jesus) who was born of God keeps and protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”
—1 John 5:18 (AMP).

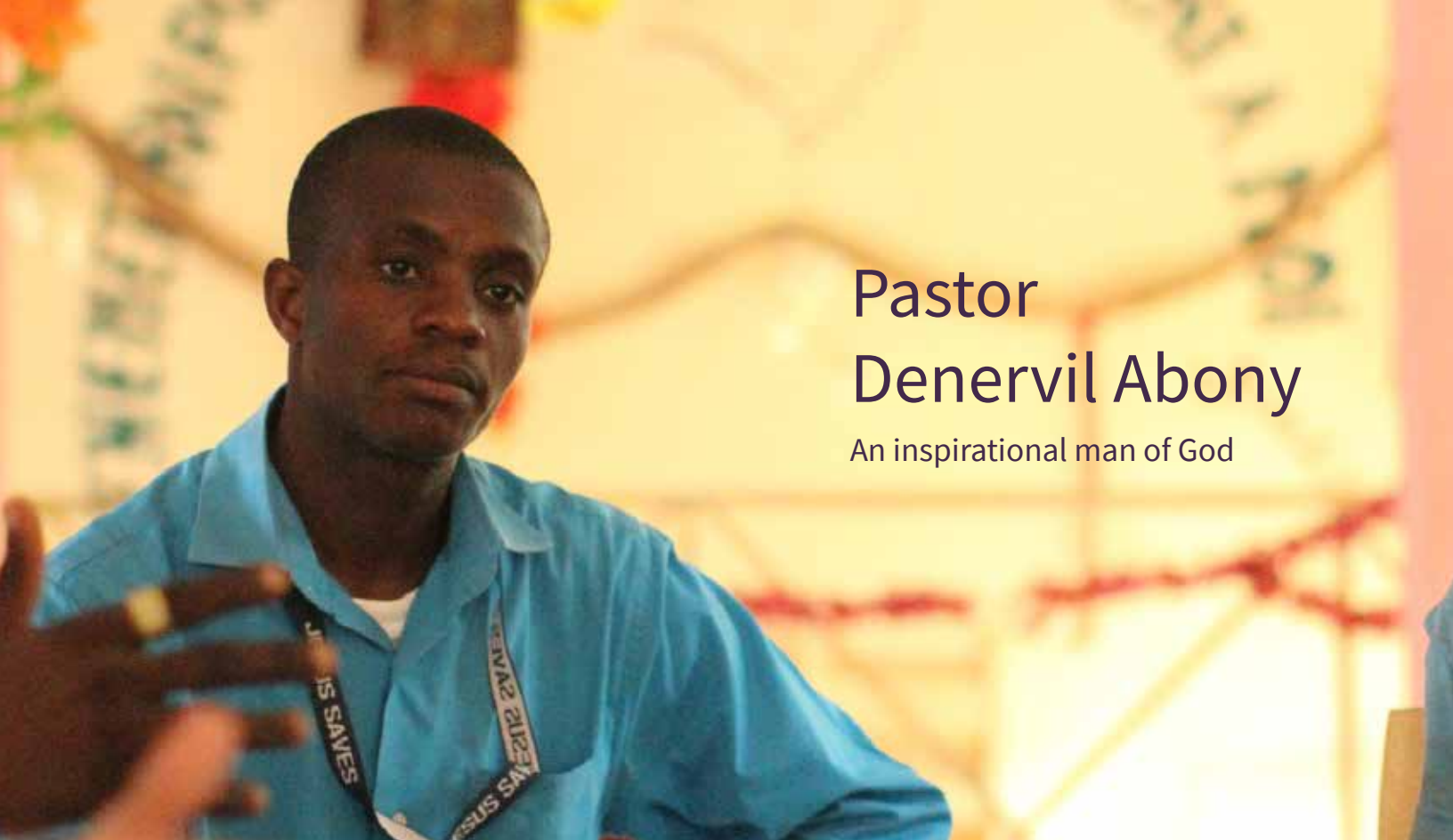
Therefore, the reality of this situation is that Deba's aunt was never truly saved despite what she claimed, and so the above verse in John 10 would not be relevant to her. John makes this clear in 1 John chapter 2 when he discusses those who walked with him, claiming to share in the faith, but ended up leaving.



Deba's father, Ofranes, had turned back to serving his demon.

“They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us they would have remained with us. However they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.”
—1 John 2:19

This is also proven by the very different responses of those who were truly saved (Ofranes and Gina), and Deba's aunt who wasn't. Ofranes and Gina felt strong conviction about their actions causing them to weep in repentance, while Deba's aunt defiantly continues to practice vodou with no disturbance of her conscience. We can use this to judge ourselves too. Is your conscience disturbed by all of the overt sin occurring in the world currently, or have you conformed and settled into it with no disturbance of your conscience at all? With this in mind it may be time to examine our own hearts and fall to our knees with tears in our eyes and repentance in our hearts.



Pastor Denervil Abony

An inspirational man of God

I also wanted to highlight pastor Abony (whose first name is Denervil) in this newsletter. We highlight so many vodou priests and priestesses, that I wanted to switch gears and talk about this inspirational man of God who God placed in our organization the very first year we were in Haiti.

Denervil didn't grow up wanting to be a pastor. He was born into a Christian family, but vocationally desired to be a teacher. He had an older brother who did go into the ministry and after completing theology school in Port au Prince started a career as a pastor. The older brother was very zealous for the Lord and wanted to prove it by performing aggressive evangelism, including the evangelism of vodou priests.

The locality where he performed evangelism was evil, and the local vodou priests were not happy with his presence and message that he was bringing to their community. One day, Denervil's brother entered a vodou temple to speak to the priest about Christ, but unbeknownst to him, this would be his last day of ministry.

A martyr for the gospel

Upon entering the temple he was met with an onslaught of machetes as the vodou priest and his followers murdered him. This very unfortunate tragedy triggered something in Denervil's heart and he felt God calling him into the ministry to continue what his brother had started. He responded positively to this call and entered theology school.



Pastor Abony's wife, Eliana, and their three children (from youngest to oldest), Jessica Sarah, Athlens, and Marc Donald.

Upon completion of school he started a small church in the mountain community in which he lived named Macary. He was bi-vocational as he worked both as a professor for his local school, and as a pastor. The really inspirational thing about Denervil is his complete and total dedication to the ministry of Jesus Christ. He refused to be at peace with just having a church in his village, as he was well aware of the multitudes of spiritually lost people in the mountains all around him. He therefore began to travel to distant mountain villages to evangelize and bring people who live in very isolated areas of the mountains the truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel. He has shared many stories with me about these initial efforts in the mountains and they have ministered to me personally and inspired me to never stop evangelizing.

Going where others wouldn't

When I first met Denervil, he had 6 churches that were birthed secondary to his willingness to go where others didn't want to go. Many of these churches began with Denervil meeting weekly with 3 to 5 people as they would all sit on the flat surface of a large rock and have church service together.

Many would most likely abandon this situation secondary to the injury inflicted to one's pride when only 3 people are coming to hear you teach and preach. This didn't stop Denervil though, and now that I have personally traveled to all 6 of his churches I appreciate the depth of love and dedication he possesses for the church of Jesus Christ.

These locations are extremely difficult to get to. Hours of riding on motorcycles over the worst possible roads, and then when the road runs out and the motorcycles can go no further we have to walk for additional hours up mountains, through rivers, and at times through rain and mud to eventually reach the small church that literally sits above the clouds. These trips made me thank God for ibuprofen! God always knew that pastor Abony was the perfect man to join this ministry, and to personally witness God's sovereign oversight and organization of His ministries on this earth grows my faith and raises my commitment to living a life completely surrendered to Him and His predetermined plan for my life as His son.

Partnering against vodou

Denervil's one fear was vodou priests, and this was to be expected considering what happened to his brother. So when I initially met with Denervil and told him that God had instructed me to focus my evangelism solely on vodou priests and priestesses, he was a bit apprehensive. I didn't say much in those first years to coerce or persuade him to join us in our evangelizing of vodou priests out of respect for what had happened to his brother. But, Denervil quickly began to see how powerfully God's hand was on this vodou ministry as he witnessed vodou priests giving their hearts to Christ and me burning down temples and sorcery books at the request of the converted priest.

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand.”
—Isaiah 41:10

For the first time in his life he was witnessing the power of the gospel conquering the vodou demons, and God began to change his heart and conquer the fear that it contained. When I saw this happening, I simply jumped on board with what God had initiated in pastor Abony's heart—a new found boldness and willingness to evangelize vodouists.

Have faith, not fear

I spent a lot of time with Denervil reading and studying passages of Scripture where God commands us not to have fear, but rather to have faith in Him. What he had to realize was that if God placed him with Charis, and God had called me to witness to vodou priests, then he, by joining us, would also fall under the protection and anointing that God has covered this ministry with, and he need not fear. Some of the verses I shared with him are good for us, as Christians, to always keep at the forefronts of our minds, and reading them will hopefully inspire all of us to obey God despite the danger or fear involved with what He has prepared for us to do in this life:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”
—Joshua 1:9

“Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cared for you.”
—1 Peter 5:7

“For God hath not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.”
—2 Timothy 1:7

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”
—John 14:27

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”
—Deuteronomy 31:6

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in You.”
—Psalm 56:3

There are so many verses that God has spoken through his Holy Spirit to ensure us that we never have to fear when our actions result from obedience to Him. Notice the verse above from Joshua. It begins with “Have I not commanded you?” If God has commanded us, we can go forward in full assurance that He is with us and will protect us—even in situations that common sense would never allow us to enter due to the danger and risk involved. Denervil now understood this and began to join us in our evangelizing of vodou priests.

Full-time ministry

After working with us for a couple of years, I saw that Denervil was having a difficult time fulfilling both his ministry duties and responsibilities as a professor. In response to this observation I asked him if he was happy working both jobs—to which he replied no. His desire was to go into ministry full-time, but financially it would be difficult. We were paying him a moderate amount of money and the school was also paying him. Both incomes were needed though to provide for his family’s needs.

After praying about this and discussing it with Joy and some of our board members, we decided to pay him what he was making working both jobs—that way he could resign from teaching and fully commit himself to the work of God. He was so happy when he heard this because now he could make routine visits to all of his churches and continue to work with us.

Pastor Denervil Abony’s passionate dedication to the evangelizing of his people serves as a great encouragement to Joy and I, and thus we continually thank God for adding him to Charis. While we are in the States, pastor Abony oversees all of the discipleship and pastoral duties of our churches and 13 Bible study groups. Together we are working to raise up leaders to share this pastoral/ ministry burden that God has so graciously placed in our hands.

Housing and school for 5 orphans

As a result of his selfless work and great love for his people and Jesus Christ, we now pay pastor Abony twice what he was making when he initially worked for us and the school. Even in his prosperity we continue to appreciate

pastor Abony’s love and humility. With the extra money he now receives from us, he doesn’t go and purchase things for himself or increase his standard of living, but rather he is paying for 5 orphan teens to go to school and he is also paying for their housing.



Pastor Abony and his wife support 5 orphan teens with school and housing with their additional income.

A role model to us all

Additionally, besides the care he provides for his wife and 3 children, he has taken in a newborn baby that his sister-in-law died giving birth to. There is so much more I could say about this man, but I share this with you all to show you someone who can serve as a role model to us all as American Christians. How many of us, when we get a raise go and make a life for an impoverished, homeless person? How many of us would take in orphaned babies whose parents have died? How many of us would spend 4-5 days a week walking up mountains for 4-5 hours both ways just to spend 1 hour with a small impoverished church to encourage them with the Word of God.



Pastor Abony adopts Asmelinda after his sister-in-law dies.

This honestly should shame us because pastor Abony is living within the words of Scripture while so many of us stand outside of Scripture observing it, but never having the willingness or boldness to jump into the pages of the Bible and live them out in a radical and surrendered manner. I highlight this man because if I didn’t, no one would ever know of him—but his life and story need to be told in an effort to both inspire and encourage us to live a more surrendered Christian life. We all know what being an American means and what being a Haitian means in terms of this world’s socio-economic standards. But the bigger question for us is what does being a Christian mean?

Christianity should not, and cannot, have an American or Haitian label placed on it because then we are dividing Christ. We all live under the standard put forth by Scripture, and I often find myself wondering why pastor Abony can so easily understand what this means, while we, in America find it so difficult to even begin to live in this way—think about this and please make the changes in your life that will find you more conformed to the Bible and not American Christianity. Please pray for pastor Abony as his burden is huge and he needs continual strength and boldness to endure his very difficult assignment!



Thank You

I just wanted to thank those of you who positively responded to our letter requesting financial help in the form of monthly giving. Many of you increased your monthly giving, signed up to become automatic monthly givers, or made one-time donations. Thank you so much!! As the ministry grows so do the financial needs and I thank all of you for realizing this and putting faith in this ministry that God is powerfully using to defeat vodou and save souls in the dark spiritual landscape of Haiti. We COULD NOT do this without you, so it is with sincere gratitude that Joy and I thank you for all of your generosity! Please continue to help us fight the devil in a country that he erroneously believes to be his stronghold!

How to continue helping

As we continue to share the gospel in Haiti, the following list will provide some very practical needs. Please prayerfully consider how you can help us win over Haiti for Christ this year.

Regular monthly giving dedicated to **support more individuals exiting vodou**. The funding is used to create sustainable income for them, as listed above, by way of purchasing land to farm, purchasing a motorcycle to use as a taxi business, purchasing animals to raise, breed and sell, etc.

Ongoing need

Regular monthly giving dedicated to **supporting more indigenous Haitian Christian workers** (pastors, nurses, translators, etc.)

Ongoing need

Regular monthly giving dedicated to **schools/education**.

Ongoing need

Regular monthly giving to support the **travel and miscellaneous costs to bring the gospel** to additional unreached mountain areas in Haiti.

Ongoing need

Mission Statement

Charis (Greek for God's Grace) operates in complete obedience to God, giving Him His rightful place in determining the path and goals of His ministry that He has, by grace, allowed us to perform. Charis primarily focuses on the unseen spiritual needs in Haiti, and secondarily on the seen physical needs, always remembering that our success is completely dependent on the will of God, the gospel of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit working effectively through us, His willing servants.

