

# Man Plans, God Directs: Using Gifts on the Mission Field

By Joy Nwoke

Life is full of plans; there are plans to complete in our to-do lists, such as study for an exam or exercise. In Scripture, God makes this clear statement in Proverbs 16:9 [NKJV] – "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." God revealed this Scripture to me as I was serving Haitians "enslaved" on sugar corporations in the Dominican



Republic. Initially, I wanted to spend my summer completing a pediatric internship. I intended to participate in a medical mission trip during my 4th-year rotations or after graduation. I was upset when my original summer plans did not occur as I planned. However, looking back now, it is clear that God directed my steps to the mission field of the Bateyes. His plans for me were in place long before I had drafted plans for myself, and I am beyond grateful to Him.

The Bateyes, in the Dominican Republic, are where Haitians harvest sugarcane and raise their families. Unfortunately, there are no local hospitals or medical providers in the area. There's uncertainty as to when the Haitians will receive medical care should anyone have an acute or chronic illness, or a minor or severe wound. Additionally, there is no access to clean water, leaving those living in the Bateyes susceptible to worm infections. Albendazole is an anti-worm agent that we gave to all patients. We also provided medication to relieve the pain experienced from working long days every day. We encountered a multitude of medical conditions and attempted to treat them after patients heard the Gospel.

The multidisciplinary team was comprised of physicians, nurses, a physical therapist, an optometrist, a pharmacist, and additional volunteers. I was the only pharmacy student

on the trip serving alongside the pharmacist. I gained the opportunity to apply what I have learned academically into practice as the pharmacy was extremely busy. I thank God for allowing me to have four years of pharmacy experience, two years of pharmacy school, and most importantly, for giving me His grace which was sufficient for the workload. I organized the pharmacy every day, filled prescriptions, and recommended substitutions based on a limited formulary.

At one point on the trip, we had packed up the pharmacy supplies to set up at another site, and the interpreters had already left to meet us there. However, a young woman brought her prescription after we loaded the truck. Thanks to God, I knew exactly where to find the medications she needed, and I was able to give her the directions of the medicines in Spanish.

It is amazing how God prepares us for the future. I took a "Spanish for Pharmacists" course in the spring and was responsible for setting up the pharmacy throughout the trip which goes to show the sovereignty of God. Partaking in those two activities were crucial for me to help the young woman – as opposed to sending her away because we had already packed up, and there were no available interpreters.

We saw patients of all ages, but mostly children. As mentioned earlier, we had a very limited formulary, so we had to conduct weight-based dosing for the children. For instance, on the last day, we ran out of liquid acetaminophen and had to dose for the chewable tablets on hand. Additionally, I prepared many antibiotic suspensions using bottled water. I witnessed so many





mothers bring their children for treatment. Again, I reflected on how God had sovereignly planned for me to take a Pediatric Pharmacotherapy elective and how that tied into this trip. The ability to see so many children and help them through pharmacy brought me joy and heightened my overall desire to specialize in pediatrics.

I saw one child with an eye condition called esotropia. The vision team had brought eyeglasses with the ideal corrective lens, which allowed her to see out of her right eye for the first time in her entire life! It was by no mistake that God placed this team in the right place and at the right time to meet the needs of the patients. Even if physical needs were not met, having the opportunity to receive Jesus and His promise of eternal life is so much more than what ibuprofen could provide.

I know that God, being Jehovah Jireh, will continue to provide for them in areas that we fell short.

God completely surpassed my expectations on this trip. I purposed in my heart to fulfill 1 Peter 4:10 [NIV] – "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." It is by God's grace that I am in pharmacy school and learning a new language, and I believe these gifts impacted the Haitians and Dominicans I encountered on this trip.

I was humbled by serving people who have nothing but live cheerfully with hearts of gratitude. The heart and hands of God were present on this entire trip to help Haitians as well as Dominicans. I didn't get a chance to pray with patients, but God helped me pray in Spanish for a hotel employee who had a cyst on her forehead.

Matthew 25:36, 40 [NIV] comes to mind when I think of this trip and my desire to continue serving in medical missions: "...I was sick, and you looked after me... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least...you did for

me." Haitians are often viewed as the least, the lost, and the last... and many came to us sick. But as we served them, we served Jesus.

In closing, I am reminded of Jeremiah 29:11 [NIV] – "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." God planned for me to be on this trip to use the gifts He has given me, just as He planned for the patients we served to hear the Gospel and have physical needs met. When presenting requests and petitions before the Lord, it is always best, as Jesus modeled in the garden of Gethsemane, to include "Yet not as I will,

but as You will" (Matthew 26:39 NIV). Submitting my will and plans to God made room for Him to do exceedingly and abundantly more in my life, and in the lives of every person served during this trip.



*Joy Nwoke is a third-year pharmacy student at Mercer University. Joy previously served and will continue serving as president of the Mercer chapter of CPFI until Spring of 2020. She is the Chairperson-elect of the National Student Council (NSC) of CPFI and will serve as Chairperson in 2020. Additionally, she is president of a campus-wide ministry, Bethel Campus Fellowship, which she chartered as a first-year pharmacy student to encourage fellowship with different programs on campus. Joy is incredibly passionate about Jesus, pharmacy, and children, and she hopes to become a pediatric pharmacist and eventually teach pediatric pharmacotherapy as a clinical associate professor. Regarding medical missions, Joy hopes to serve annually and primarily in Latin American countries to use her Spanish speaking and clinical skills.*