



These photos are of my family and me in 2015, taking refuge for a day high in the mountains of Kenscoff at Baptist Haiti Mission. The air there held a constant coolness, and in those days you could take in the incredible view, eat lunch at the mission, buy Haitian-made crafts, visit the petting zoo, and let the kids play on the playground. For one day, eleven years ago, our family found refuge there...

Where Do the Children of Dessalines Find Refuge?

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America says Haiti is too dangerous for Americans to travel to, while deciding that conditions no longer justify protecting Haitians from being sent back there. Which is it?

Is Haiti a U.S. State Department “Level 4: Do Not Travel” country, where I am strongly advised not to enter with mission teams because of the danger to American travelers, or have conditions somehow improved enough that the extraordinary protections of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) are no longer warranted?

Let’s look for an answer in what happened just this past Sunday night in Kenscoff, a beautiful mountain community overlooking Port au Prince.

Armed gangs attacked the community. At least 47 people were killed. Five were children. More than 50 people were kidnapped. According to the United Nations, 22 of those killed were reportedly executed in a church compound where they had gone seeking refuge. Think about that word for a moment. Refuge. Let that sink in. That’s what we seek when the world caves in.

When armed men came into their community, human beings did what frightened human beings have done for centuries. They ran to the church seeking sanctuary. I suspect instinctively they ran to a place where they had prayed a thousand times before. Maybe the violence couldn’t follow them there. But it did.

If not on their own streets, if not in my country, if not even in a church, where do the children of Dessalines find refuge? Where do Dessalines’ descendants go when their neighborhoods are overrun, their roads controlled, their corrupt government fails completely, their homes burned, and blind bullets find their targets when young men armed with other people’s guns, fueled by desperation and hate pulls a trigger?

Where do they go when the most influential government on the planet tells its own citizens: “Do not travel to Haiti for any reason.” I’m warned to avoid Haiti because of crime, gangs, kidnapping, and instability. We haven’t taken a mission team to Haiti in years because of the very real danger, especially in communities like those we know and love so close to Port au Prince.

But at the very same time that I’m told to stay out of Haiti, our government has ended Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of thousands of Haitians. Haiti is apparently dangerous enough that Americans should not go there, but somehow not dangerous enough to warrant continued protection for Haitians.

How are these two judgments morally coherent?

In fact, last week a U.S. deportation flight carrying more than 160 people landed in Cap Haïtien (O’Kap) rather than Port au Prince because “the main international airport in Port-au-Prince is considered too dangerous” (Associated Press, Aug. 20, 2026).

Read that again if you need to. We avoided landing the airplane in Port au Prince because of the danger while using that airplane to return human beings to Haiti.

At what point does that contradiction become impossible to ignore? At what point will we refuse to allow another human being to become invisible on this planet? At what point will we begin to see beyond borders, categories, skin, or any other arbitrary distinction that keeps us from first seeing the image of God in every human being?

There is nothing normal about Haiti’s suffering. Our commonplace acceptance of it is called apathy. The numbers sanitize the reports. Forty-seven people total. Five children. Twenty-two people seeking sanctuary in a church. Not statistics. Souls.

Every one of them bears the image of God. So when I ask people to pray for Haiti, it isn’t an abstraction. Jean-Jacques Dessalines was the revolutionary leader who declared Haiti’s independence in 1804 and one of the founding fathers of the Haitian nation.

Haiti’s 1805 Constitution declared with breathtaking simplicity: “Slavery is forever abolished.” A decade later, Haiti went even further. Its 1816 Constitution declared: “The right of asylum is sacred and inviolable within the Republic.” It offered Africans, Indigenous people, and their descendants from beyond Haiti’s shores a pathway to belonging and citizenship, in era when both were in short supply, especially for marginalized peoples.

Think of the historical irony. A nation born from enslaved people breaking their own chains once wrote refuge into its own understanding of freedom. Again. Where do the children of Dessalines, the descendants of a people who once offered refuge to the oppressed, go to find refuge now?

Pray for Haiti. But please, first, see Haiti. See the mother. See the child. See the people who ran toward a church because they believed there might still be somewhere safe in the world. Where are they supposed to go? Home is too dangerous to stay and the world says, “Go home.” Where are they supposed to go?

God help us if our answer continues to be: Somewhere else.