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## WHY WE DIDN'T QUIT!



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SUPPORT PLEDGED



IBEROAMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

## **August**

In August I had the opportunity to return to Brazil for the start of a new cohort and to lead the residency for a group of Brazilian students entering the second year of the Masters of Theological Studies (MTS) program. These two residencies were taking place in the same location, at the same time. As I write this, I believe that the second year cohort from Brazil is the only one (so far) that has started their second year without anyone dropping out.



## **Community**

My experience was a gift of surprises. Teaching spiritual formation has been an invitation into a process of discipleship I could not have foreseen. One of the issues that invariably comes up in the course is that God did not intend for our faith to be individualistic and private. We are not meant to go it alone in our life with God. We need and long for community, but we are not good at leaning into it...it can feel unsafe to risk being vulnerable. Christian psychologist David Benner says, "But what is this knowing of God that is of supreme value, that gives God such pleasure, and that gives us genuine and eternal life? It is personal knowing—knowing that begins with belief but is deepened through relationship. Many of the things we know about God we know objectively, accepting them as facts on the trusted testimony of scriptures and the community of faith. These [together] ground our more personal knowing, serving as an anchor in times of doubt and a frame of reference for making sense of our experience."



## **Intensity**

I worked intensely with the second year group. We were pulling apart the past year (what had been their 1st year in the program) with the hope of recognizing God's invitations of transformation through learning. It's not easy to look back and pick out significant learning points and identify what is shifting in understanding of self, God, vocation, and calling. That was our task. What happened is my most surprising gift from this group because it was not centered on the individual but the community...an online community!

## **Wisdom**

In the middle of the week we had the second year students come over to the new cohort to share wisdom regarding the program and its courses. It was going along as one might expect until I asked the second year group, "How many of you wanted to quit at some point during the first year?" I stood a little dumfounded as I saw each of the 16 students raise a hand. No one said anything. They just looked at each other with what I can only describe as love filled with admiration and gratitude. I then asked, "Why didn't you quit?" They all replied, "Because they wouldn't let me...we wouldn't give up on each other. We needed each other to get through not just the courses but our life struggles, too."



### **Ground and Anchor**

The students discovered that their life with each other and their life with God intersected on the ground of growing in knowledge God, understanding of self, and experience in community. Over the year this ground became the anchor each one of them needed when times were difficult. It was evident that this forging of community had involved the risk of being vulnerable with each other. I believe there is no growing without vulnerability and I was seeing how true this is for community. The students were living the reality of David Benner's earlier words: Knowing God and relationship "ground our more personal knowing, serving as an anchor in times of doubt and a frame of reference for making sense of our experience."

### **Gift**

Benner also writes, "The goal of the spiritual life is the transformation of self. It requires both knowing God and self. The self is where we meet God." May we all find ourselves in a community where who we are is known and loved and accepted, as God knows and loves and accepts us. A community that shares such life with God is the ground and anchor we all long for. What a gift and privilege to witness. Thank you, Brazil!

David Reed

**P.S. Joyce's News:** I began a Doctor of Ministry program with Portland Seminary in Leadership & Spiritual Formation! It is a long-

distance learning program with 2 residencies a year. This program will be enhancing my ministry of teaching Spiritual Formation in the Masters of Theological Studies to Latinos/as, and also in the emerging work of spiritual renewal and member care within International Ministries. I appreciate your prayers as I learn to hold school, teaching, mentoring, ministry and family all at once!