



*We were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's good news, but our own lives too.*

1 Thessalonians 2:7b-8

March 11, 2019

Dear friends,

We greet you once again from our home along the Colonso River. We set out for Ecuador for the first time five winters ago. Since then we have developed a rhythm of connecting with friends and colleagues in the capitol city of Quito, spending time in Tena making preparations to be offline for a while, and then floating down the Aguarico River for extended visits to the village of Zábalo. We are constantly moving – moving between cultures, beliefs and realities – yet called to be present. Here are Jane's reflections on her time so far this year...

This past month I have journeyed through Teri J. Plank Brenneman's Bible study guide, *Practicing Presence*, digging into scripture to learn from biblical stories how to be present and reflecting on our call as missionaries to accompany people in eastern Ecuador. What struck me most was the demeanor of Paul and other missionaries as they introduced the gospel: "Not only did the missionaries bring good news about Jesus, they also gave their own selves". Inspired by Richard Rohr's promise that "When you can be present, you will know the Real Presence," I committed myself to practice living and experiencing each moment, and each person with intention and effort.



I honestly wondered, where might this take me?

It took me to the bedroom of my Kichwa neighbor and her newborn baby. It took me to the bedside of a dying woman; God was with us, and we were not afraid. It took me to the doorstep of a young mother, where words seemed inadequate to share the pain of betrayal – my presence was all I had to give. It took me to our neighbor's house to stand in solidarity

as the horror of domestic violence was recounted. It took me to the sideline of a soccer game to hear a young boy's confessions, to the river's edge at washing time to accompany women in their daily chores, to my own home in the evening to offer a soothing cup of tea for a sore throat to a teenage boy without a mother. It took me beyond human experience, as I listened to a father and son share recent dreams filled with creative symbols which spoke of God's promises for new purpose and meaning in their lives. During all these times God was revealed to me in experience, not dogma.



I'm wondering if we are being called to practice presence in transition? The Cofán of Zábaló are experiencing a transition in their culture as the phenomenon of "teenagers" is emerging for the first time. Most of the parents of today's teens were already married by 15 or 16 years of age, and many of the marriages were arranged by their parents. Today's teens are typically still in high school and are pushing marriage and

adulthood off for at least a few years. Equal opportunities for education, family planning, and choices in marriage partners are just a few of the shifts taking place. The path ahead for both parents and teens demands walking in trust, risk and various degrees of darkness. Could it be that Jerrell and I are being called to be these teenagers' "nannies," as Randy Borman affectionately called us? Companioning the teenagers and their parents through this transition into foreign territory, we take comfort knowing that it took the Israelites forty years to transition to new traditions, habits, and beliefs.

Please pray for wisdom, forgiveness, and patience to form good relationships as we journey together. May the awareness of God's presence that the Cofán already have help them prepare for what is to come, and guide them to seek to understand more, listen more, and experience more of God's grace and love. And, as Plank Brenneman writes, "may we be manna, guardian angel, and living Scripture" to our dear friends who may find themselves wandering in the wilderness for a while.

