

Direct route to God

Trey Hall on January 26, 2014

I started taking Spanish a few months ago. I signed up for a 101 level group class, and even though I hadn't had a day of Spanish in my entire life, I imagined that I would be speaking the language beautifully within a matter of weeks.

Week one was a triumph.

I learned, *Hola, como estas? Me llamo Trey. Vivo en Chicago.*

I amazed myself. I was so good. I delighted people with my new greetings.

"Oh, you speak Spanish," they said. I didn't know.

"Si, poquito," I responded.

I put a line of Pablo Neruda's poetry on my Facebook page, in the original Spanish, and everyone was very impressed.

This euphoria lasted precisely one week, until I showed up back to class and found out that my fellow students were already well ahead of me.

Why?

Well, because typing Neruda on your Facebook page is not the same thing as doing your homework, which I had totally avoided.

It turns out that in order to actually understand what people might say back to you when you ask *Como estas?* you have to go a bit deeper and learn some vocabulary and conjugate some verbs and practice speaking.

Every week, on the afternoon before class, having done no homework the previous six days, I would experience this super-strong temptation just to bail. Every week. I hadn't done the reading. You know that feeling. Not one week went by where I didn't think, on Monday afternoon: *I'm going to skip tonight because* (fill in all the excuses that your mind generates),

...I've had a long day already and deserve a night off;

... I don't like that one guy in the class;

...I haven't done my homework, and at this point I'm so far behind it'd be better just to skip the rest of the classes and sign up for the next Spanish 101 course, and then work really hard from the beginning and be the best student ever!

Every week, I felt like my choice was either bail or, what I ended up doing, cram for three hours before class so I could show up and seem to know what I was doing.

Bail, or try to seem perfect? Those were the choices. Neither of which actually helped me enjoy the language.

After a couple months of this fraught experience, of feeling the same way every Monday, I began to wonder if all this emotional drama I was having was not just about Spanish class but was a sign that I was hitting up against something much deeper in me. Maybe the core fear was not only that I sucked at Spanish, but that old fear of mine, that maybe I sort of sucked in general. Not only that I wasn't smart at Spanish, but that I wasn't smart at all. And so, no wonder I was considering bailing! Who wants to bump up against that stuff, right?!

Has that kind of thing ever happened to you?

You're in something new—a class, a job, a gym, maybe you've started seeing a counselor, maybe you've started dating someone—and you're fine until that new thing opens you up to something in yourself that you don't want to address, some deeper thing that you haven't let yourself face before. And when that happens, there is this temptation to get the hell out of there? All these feelings start erupting and you're like, *Bail! Or, Repress!*

Those are the usual choices: bail or repress, escape or control.

And yet I believe that contending face-to-face with that core thing that you're bumping up against is the doorway to freedom. The thing we're most afraid of is often the most direct route to God.

What is it for you? Let me know, seriously, at trey@urbanvillagechurch.org or on Twitter at @PastorTreyHall.

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