

Missionary Debriefing

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Introduction:

In the early 2000's CBS News had a news feature called, "*Everybody Has a Story.*" Every two weeks they threw a dart at a map of the United States. The correspondent then went to wherever the dart landed, randomly picked a name from the local telephone book and went to the address. He wrote and then shared the story of someone that lived at that address. The map that was used is in a CBS storeroom and has 123 holes in it.

Those of us that have the Bible have a huge advantage over those whose stories are recorded for us in the Bible. We have the "rest of the story." For example:

John 11:1-45

vss. 1-3, 6, 20-21 ??What if for **Martha** the story **stopped** right there??

vss. 28-29...32 ??What if for **Mary** the story **stopped** right **there**??

One of the effects of trauma...in the lives of some people...is that their "story" gets "stuck" in a traumatic event.

A person's story involves: people...places...events...gains...losses...and...in most cases....some very, very painful things.

Every missionary has a story.

A missionaries story is usually viewed as a "term" on the field.

A missionaries story is generally told to their supporting churches and in new churches where they hope to gain support.

They are usually given 15-20 minutes, every few years, to tell their story.

Many pastors and church evaluate a missionary's story to determine if they are a worthwhile investment.

The net result is that a missionary's "whole" story is rarely processed and almost never told to others..

Some missions agencies expect a missionary to make a visit to the office during their furlough in order to review their term on the field.

- In many cases it is for the benefit of the "work" and not the "worker."
- In many cases the review is relatively short in comparison to their term on the field.
- In many cases those listening to a missionaries story are primarily administrators and not ministers.
- In this type of scenario a missionary is very, very unlikely to tell the "whole truth."
- In this type of scenario a missionary actually begins to feel like they are not telling the truth because they tell the good and pretend that there is no "bad" and "ugly." They may begin to see themselves as dishonest.
- After a couple of terms of this pattern many missionaries grow cynical at best and at worst begin to look for a reason to leave the field that will be acceptable to their supporters", they become a "resident" of a foreign country or "the lid comes off."

What is a personal Missionary Debriefing.

1. It is an opportunity for a missionary to tell their story to the degree and depth of their choosing.
2. It is the for a missionary to plot their term on the field on a time line noting the significant events, outstanding blessings, gains, and losses.
3. It is the opportunity to share, discuss, and rejoice over the blessings and gains.
4. It is the opportunity to face, share, process, and grieve the pain and losses.
5. It is the opportunity to reflect on how God wants to integrate the recent term into who the missionary is becoming in Christ. **Rom. 8:28**

Much of our evaluation of missionaries focuses on what they have “done” or accomplished and...ignores who they are in Christ and who they are becoming in Christ. Focusing primarily on what we have “done” for God is a path to peril.

"How tragic an expression of shallowness for one to say about a person who has experienced any of life's stressful events, 'Oh, they'll get over it.' We change. We adjust. We compensate. We accommodate to change. But we don't 'get over it.' It becomes a building block in our life experience. It becomes a part of who we are becoming." - Neal Pirolo in The Rentry Team- Caring for Your Returning Missionaries.

A personal missionary debriefing is **not:**

1. A gathering of information in order for a missions agency in order to evaluate, analyze, and/or confront.
2. For the benefit of the administrators of a missions agency.
3. Counseling, therapy or an evaluation of a missionary.
4. Only for when there is a problem or a critical incident.
5. Used to generate a written or oral report about a missionary or their ministry.

Conclusion:

A proper, personal missionary debriefing is best accomplished with:

- A. Safe People-** strangers...trained in debriefing...that understand and practice confidentiality
- B. Safe Place-** several days at a nice...comfortable...relaxing place and most preferably, without their children
- C. Safe Speech-** people who speak “missionary”

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