

Personal Missionary Debriefing

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There are three types of missionary debriefing. The **first** is a **Critical Incident Stress Management** debriefing. The **second** is an **Operational** debriefing. It is for the benefit of the **WORK** (the ministry.) The **third** is a **Personal** debriefing. It is for the benefit of the **WORKER** (the missionary.)

“Debriefing is an intentional, scheduled listening time. It allows a time and place for a missionary... to verbalize, normalize, and contextualize their most recent term on the field. It is asking how life and ministry have been for the individual and how it is affecting them.”

“During debriefing, we are asking the questions:

- 1. **Where have you been?** How were things during this past season of ministry? What was accomplished? What was worth celebrating? What was disappointing?*
- 2. **Where are you now?** How are you doing now? Where are your stress points today? What burdens do you carry? What are you celebrating? How are you managing this time of transition?*
- 3. **Where are you going?** Are there changes coming for you? Do you need some resources or help? What are you looking forward to?” - Lois McMartin (edited)*

A **personal missionary debriefing** could be described as unpacking, reflecting on, deciding about, and processing the things you have been carrying with you in your life and ministry. An illustration of this is a shoe box of unique treasures accumulated during your childhood. Another illustration is a collection of high school mementos, including yearbooks, a graduation tassel, “love” notes from your “first love,” etc. A third illustration is the boxes packed after a spouse dies and before moving to an assisted living facility. Each box contains memories of good times and bad times. It could have reminders of accomplishments yet dashed expectations. It could hold buried unmet expectations and dreams, yet the joy of unexpected opportunity. It could contain emotions and reactions from heartaches and disappointments to happiness and unparalleled success.

Picture yourself pulling out one of those boxes, dusting it off, and removing the cover. You then pull the items out of the box one at a time. You may set some down very quickly and move on to the next one. You may hold some things in your hands for an extended time, thinking about the memories associated with that particular item and the time in life it represents. There may be some items that you do not remember why you put into the box. Some may be hurriedly set out of sight or returned to the box. The items in the box may bring unexpected, deep, and painful responses. The responses may be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Unfortunately, many of life’s “boxes” are **packed unsorted and unsettled**.

In some cases, this would amount to sorting “junk.” For others, it would be a very emotional time, sorting through buried hurts, thinking through highs and lows, and reflecting on the people associated with the various items. It would include putting painful things in their proper perspective and seeing how they contributed to the person that you currently are. It would also be a time for many to realize that there were more blessings than burdens.

A personal missionary debriefing is an “unpacking” of the events, goals, gains, expectations, disappointments, victories, hurts, and blessings of a term on the field. They are laid out, perhaps rediscovered, discussed, and processed. They are sorted, understood as best they can be, and examined in light of Scripture. The time spent sorting and processing the spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical items in a particular “box” allows each to be better understood. They are integrated into who we are becoming in Christ and how He is working all things together for good. Rom. 8:28 It helps us learn to trust God's slow but sure work.

A new “box” is prepared for the next term of service. A missionary who has been debriefed will better understand the new things that will come along and may need processing before being packed away. There may be other things that won't need packing away. This understanding can prepare a missionary to “unpack” and process along the way rather than store up, whether done intentionally or unintentionally.

A personal debriefing is **CONFIDENTIAL**. It is **NOT** for the benefit of a missions agency. It does **NOT** generate a written report to pass up the chain of command. It is **NOT** counseling or therapy. A person with debriefing **TRAINING** guides it. It is best done **AFTER** two or three months in one's passport country following a term on the field. It is best accomplished over **SEVERAL DAYS**. It is best performed by a person that is **UNKNOWN** personally to the missionary but is trusted by someone that the missionary knows and trusts.