

FRIENDSHIP DEBRIEFING

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There is an epidemic of loneliness in missions. That's one reason to learn to listen better. I listed some of the kinds of loneliness many missionaries experience—and came up with 21 kinds! Not all missionaries experience all of these, but all of us experience many of them. And no matter where we are, someone around us is going through one of the situations I describe in that paper. (A copy is available on request; it is listed in the Reading List.)

The antidote to some of the kinds of loneliness is relationships built through genuine listening. There are few better gestures of genuine respect than sincere listening to one another. A Costa Rico proverb says, "One person alone neither sings nor cries."

In this session we'll look at the first of four levels of debriefing. The four levels of debriefing are described in a paper in your Reading List. We will examine the skills needed for level one, give a suggested process, and identify someone who could do this friendship debrief.

Skills needed for a Level One debrief (friend to friend).

Listening

With ears, eyes, heart

Drawing out

Free information

Non-interrogating questions

Silence

Minimal self-disclosure

Observation

Experience

Giving feedback

Prayer

What else is necessary or desirable?

A supportive, trustworthy friend

A quiet place

An unhurried person

Some information

Who can do this?

You could!

Process (four steps)

Reporting of facts (what happened; \)

Sharing of feelings

Example:

Suppose a family supported by our church recently came home from South Africa or Afghanistan or Indonesia. The wife in this family seems harried and stressed, someone who could use a caring friend. What do you do? Begin by being friendly!

Then go to the Missions Committee (or whoever monitors the missionaries supported by your church) and ask for information on this family—when did they go to their field? Type of work they're engaged in, number and ages of children, surprising events happening in their last term. You ask for some of the recent news letters, and you get out an atlas and see where their place of ministry is.

You're better equipped now with basic information. So you approach the wife, and ask if she'd like to go out for coffee some morning this week—you know a quiet place where they serve good coffee, and other drinks and snacks are available as well. You put an extra packet of Kleenex in your purse—she may need it!

The coffee time happens. Some chit-chat is necessary to establish a tentative relationship—who you are, (be brief), etc. Include also whatever facts have drawn you to her—you have children of a similar age; you have a relative serving in that country; it's been in the news a lot lately; you have pictured yourself trying to care for your family in such a situation, You want to understand your missionaries better.

Possible Questions:

- What was it like for you to go there with your family?
- Looking back, what did you enjoy about being there?
- What did you miss about America?
- What took you by surprise?
- What was hardest?

Use the skills mentioned above, listen well, draw out, notice what she freely says and what she is hesitant to discuss (don't push), be comfortable with silence if she wants to be silent, be very careful about self-disclosure. Observation (I have heard that it is very dangerous there now.) or "I can tell that it's hard for you to talk about that experience." "That would have been hard for me too." Etc. How did you experience God's comfort?"

At the end, give some feedback. "It seems to me that you did exceedingly well in a very difficult situation. "I imagine you learned a lot about how to cope in strange places and circumstances." "I am amazed at your courage."

And finally, pray for her and with her. Be sure to ask if you may. She may need reassurance that what she tells you will not be passed on to anyone. This would seriously damage her trust.

Let's practice: Get into triads, and practice. One person will be the missionary, another will be the debriefer, and the third will be the observer. Talk for 2 minutes or so, stop and ask the observer what went well, and where the debriefer could improve. Then switch roles, so all three have an opportunity to do a debrief. Questions?

Discussion Questions:

1. Who needs debriefing?
2. When should it happen?
3. Who owns the information?
4. What about on-going or chronic stress?
5. How is debriefing an act of encouragement and a strengthening of one another?
6. What good things does debriefing do? Why debrief?
7. What about children's needs to be debriefed?
8. Do you need to be debriefed (listened to)?
9. What do you have and know that would make you a good debriefer?
10. What are the essential qualities of a good debriefer?
11. What is PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome) and how can we prevent it? Who is at risk? What factors have been found to increase the risk of such a reaction? What does an ordinary church member do when he/she suspects the missionary is burned out, or experiencing high levels of stress? If someone seems to be seriously troubled, you could encourage them to seek further help. Have the names of a couple of therapists in mind or ask Patrick Repp for their recommendations.
12. Is it ever too late to be debrief

Reading List:

"*Debriefing As Encouragement: Four levels*" by Laura Mae Gardner.
"*The Many Faces and Kinds of Loneliness in Missions*, by Larrie Gardner.
"*Debriefing in Mission Settings*," by Bowman, Gardner, and Williams.
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