

10 Tips for Debriefing Short-Term Missions

Debriefing short-term mission trip participants is essential to help them process their experiences, reflect on personal and spiritual growth, and integrate what they've learned into their daily lives. Here are tips for pastors, church leaders, or missions team members to effectively facilitate a debrief:

1. Set Clear Goals for Debriefing

- Purpose: Help participants process emotions, reflect on their experiences, and identify next steps.
- Key Outcomes:
 - Understanding what God taught them during the trip.
 - Processing challenges, joys, and lessons.
 - Encouraging practical applications in their home context.

2. Create a Safe and Supportive Space

- Ensure participants feel comfortable sharing honestly without fear of judgment.
- Set expectations for confidentiality within the group.
- Be a good listener, validating their feelings and experiences.

3. Structure the Debrief Process

Plan a mix of group discussions, personal reflection, and one-on-one conversations. Debriefing can happen:

- Immediately after the trip (within 1-2 days).
- A week later to allow deeper reflection.
- Follow-up after a month to assess longer-term impact.

Framework for Discussion:

- **What?** What did you see, learn, and experience?
- **So What?** How did you feel throughout the trip? What challenged you emotionally or spiritually?
- **Now What?** How will you apply this experience moving forward?

4. Ask Thoughtful, Open-Ended Questions

Reflecting on the Experience

- What was a high point (joyful moment) and a low point (challenging moment) of the trip?
- What surprised you most during the trip?
- How did this experience compare to your expectations?

Spiritual Growth

- How did you see God at work—in others, in yourself, or in the community?
- What did you learn about your faith or relationship with God?
- Did you experience any personal challenges or growth moments?

Emotional Processing

- How did you feel returning home? Excited? Conflicted? Overwhelmed?
- Were there moments of culture shock or personal discomfort? How did you handle them?

Application and Integration

- What has changed in your perspective about missions, the world, or yourself?
- How can you use what you've learned to impact your daily life, church, or community?
- What commitments do you want to make as a result of this experience?

5. Normalize Post-Trip Challenges

- Help participants understand that feelings like reverse culture shock, restlessness, or disconnection from home life are normal.
- Encourage patience with themselves as they process and adjust.

6. Encourage Action Steps

- Help participants identify practical next steps:
 - Sharing their experience with others (e.g., testimony in church).
 - Serving in local ministry or missions.
 - Supporting global missions through prayer, giving, or advocacy.
- Follow up on these commitments in future meetings.

7. Provide Ongoing Support

- Offer follow-up meetings or check-ins to see how they're applying their experience.

- Connect participants with mentors or small groups if they need deeper guidance.
- Offer resources on missions, spiritual growth, or reentry challenges.

8. Incorporate Prayer and Scripture

- Close with group or individual prayer, thanking God for their experiences and seeking His guidance for next steps.
- Share Scripture to encourage them, such as:
 - Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."
 - Romans 12:1-2: "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

9. Encourage Sharing with the Church

- Plan for participants to share testimonies or presentations about their trip. This can inspire and encourage the broader church community.

10. Follow a Grace-Filled, Reflective Tone

- Avoid turning debriefing into an evaluation or performance review of the trip. Focus on personal growth, lessons learned, and God's work through the experience.