

Chapter 2

Closing the Last Chapter: Part I— Leaving Good things

We seem to live our lives in “sections” with transitions between these sections. We go to preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and then to work. In our work we may flip burgers a while, teach a while, preach a while, then serve as missionaries a while, etc. We may think of these sections as being like chapters in a book. Some people actually write their autobiographies as chapters in journals or diaries. Other people just have them “written” on the pages of their mind and grouped together in one section of their memory.

When you come to the end of a chapter of your life and are ready to transition into the next one, it is often helpful to review what has happened in the chapter you just completed. This is a good time to see how the most recent chapter fits in with the overall story of your life and bring that chapter to a close. You started the chapter review when you filled out your debrief form as you responded to items about your ministry, your colleagues on the field, your family, nationals, your field director, etc. Now that you have actually returned to your passport country, it is time to bring that chapter to a close and begin to anticipate the next chapter in your life.

People may find it difficult to close one chapter to go on to the next. If they cannot emotionally leave the things of one chapter behind, such people may have trouble getting into the next chapter. They may carry things over from one chapter to the next and never get closure. Taking time to reflect on what has happened and talking

things over with others who have similar experiences often helps lift the emotional fog so that one does not continue with baggage from the previous chapter. Reflection also helps with grieving the loss of your host country and culture.

Since you are back in your passport country, change has come in your life. Now you are in transition, the reorientation process already taking place within you as you adapt to the change that has taken place. Your transition probably began several weeks or months ago as you made plans to return. A good way to continue that transition process is to consider some of the good things that have happened to you. Paul and Barnabas must have done this when they returned from their first term of service because their friend, Luke, recorded some good things in Acts 13-14.

- Paul preached a marvelous message of encouragement in Antioch (in Pisidia) (13:16-41).
- The sermon was so good that as he was leaving, he was invited back to preach the next week (13:42).
- At Iconium he spoke so effectively that many Jews and Gentiles alike believed (14:1).
- That message was confirmed by miracles (14:1-3).
- In Lystra the healing was so dramatic that people thought Paul and Barnabas were gods (14:8-12).

Even as an experienced missionary at the end of his third term of service Paul reviewed many of the good things he had done. While talking with the elders of the Ephesian church, he mentioned the following things (Acts 20).

- _ Served the Lord with great humility (v. 19)
- _ Preached anything that would be helpful (v. 20)

- _ Taught publicly (v. 20)
- _ Taught in homes (v. 20)
- _ Did not discriminate racially (v. 21)
- _ Obeyed the Holy Spirit (v. 22)
- _ Preached the kingdom (v. 25)
- _ Proclaimed the whole will of God (v. 27)
- _ Never stopped warning the people (v. 31)
- _ Committed people to God's grace (v. 32)
- _ Took no money for his service (v. 33)
- _ Supplied his own needs (v. 34)
- _ Supplied the needs of those with him (v. 34)
- _ Modeled that we must work hard to help the needy (v. 35)

Go back to the top of Paul's list to the Ephesian elders and check off the ones that you have done yourself in your most recent term of service. No one will have done them all, but you will have probably done some of them. Then go on to the blank spaces at the end of the list and add other good things that you have done.

Take time to look at your debrief form and first consider some of the other good things that have happened this term.

- What were some of the most satisfying things that happened during your term? Why were they so satisfying?

- What were some of the most enjoyable things that happened?

- How have you grown during this term?

- What has God done in your life this term?

- How did your fellow missionaries help you grow?

- What did you like the most about your fellow missionaries?

- What did you like the most about the nationals?

- If you are married, what good things happened in your family?

- How do the above fit with the rest of your life story, with previous chapters in your life?

- How do you see God using these good experiences as stepping stones into the next chapter of your life?

- What were some things you dreaded that turned out to be good?

Often those who have the hardest time re-entering their passport culture are the ones who had the most terrific time while on the field. If you now feel loneliness, frustration, fear, confusion and so forth, remember that such feelings may lead to insight and personal growth. What good things are you leaving behind (losing) that you are grieving for?

- Your Bible study group that has been your support for the last

three years?

- Your identity as a church planter, seminary professor, English teacher, etc...?

- Fellowship with colleagues, nationals, etc....?

- Stability of home (what has become home)..?

- Certainty of your role?

What good things are you bringing with you?

- New family member by birth, marriage, adoption, etc. ...?

- Deeper faith in God and confidence in his working through you?

- New skills in relating to others?

- A larger view of the world and its needs?
