

Twenty Ways to Refresh the Hearts of the Missionary Saints on Furlough by Jason Carter.

In my own experience, church members often appreciate missionaries, admire their sacrifice for the Gospel and think highly of their ministries. Yet it's hard to understand that returning for furlough to one's "home" country can be a highly exhausting and stressful experience for many missionary families. Between the tension-filled task of an international move, setting up a new place to live, a frenzied travel schedule and finding one's missionary budget stretched to the limit, a missionary faces a multitude of challenges during furlough.

Many missionaries that I know get reprimanded by their mission leaders to physically rest, spiritually recharge, invest in their marriages and reflect on ministry practices during furlough. These are formidable challenges amidst busy schedules. To borrow a phrase from Henry Nouwen, many missionaries come home on furlough as "wounded healers" who desperately need the body of Christ during their home assignment.

Recently, Jason Helopoulos challenged us to be like Philemon in encouraging the hearts of the Lord's people. The apostle Paul commended Philemon as embodying traits which refreshed the body of Christ: "Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people" ([Philemon 1:7](#)).

What would it look like for the body of Christ to refresh the hearts of missionaries on furlough? Here are a few practical ways that you can serve those who serve:

1. If you are part of a bible study or small group, adopt a missionary family from the supported missionaries of your church. Pray for them regularly. Send care packages, birthday cards and encouraging letters.
2. Buy a kindle for a missionary. Tell them to make a long list of books they want to read. Regularly buy kindle books for them when they return overseas.
3. If you are a dentist, offer free or discounted dental work. If you are a lawyer, offer to update their last will and testament. If you are a counselor, offer free marital counseling (i.e. a marriage tune-up). Use your vocational gifts to bless the missionary body of Christ.

4. Offer to host a dinner party where the missionary can share about the ministry. If there are financial needs, share those needs with the group so the missionary doesn't have to.
5. Offer to keep in storage some of their earthly belongings while they are serving overseas.
6. Send a missionary to a Christian conference or spiritual retreat where they will be equipped and refreshed for the ministry.
7. Purchase return plane tickets for the missionary's family. Two overseas trips in a short time frame (to the States & back to their field of service) are extremely expensive for most missionary budgets.
8. Offer to give the missionary couple a date night every week or two. Instead of inviting the whole family to dinner, offer to take the kids for a night.
9. Own a condo or time-share? Gift a week (and spending money) to a missionary family.
10. Nominate yourself as Chairperson of their Furlough Committee. You might be a committee of one, but you can scout out housing in advance of their furlough, equip the place with some furniture and leave a Fruit Basket (or Krispy Kreme donuts) on their front step when they arrive from overseas.
11. Loan (or give) a car to a missionary family to use during their furlough, and find a couple car seats for their children.
12. Tell the missionary all the ways you have diligently prayed specifically for them.
13. If the missionary family homeschools, offer to buy some curriculum or books for the missionary kids.
14. Have your own kids adopt a missionary family. When the family returns overseas, encourage your kids to pray for the missionary kids' international or home schooling, friendships with national kids, foreign language learning, good health, and that the kids will come to love and serve Jesus Christ.

15. Ask to see the pictures. All of them. Via photos, see their adopted clan, meet their missionary colleagues and get a feel for their ministry context. It's cathartic for missionaries when people are interested in their life and ministry.
16. Ask the missionary family for a list of movies they want to watch during their next term overseas. Purchase 25 DVD movies so that the missionaries can enjoy a "movie night" during their next term of service. Netflix and quality DVD movies (gasp!) still are not available in many countries.
17. Set up a home office for their furlough: desk, chair, computer and printer.
18. Encourage your kids to invite the missionary kids over for play dates, play on their soccer teams and take them to youth group. Remember, while the parents may enjoy long-lasting friendships with members of their home church, missionary kids often experience all these new people as strangers.
19. Let them know you are filled with joy at their service and sacrifice for the Gospel.
20. Tell them all the ways you will be praying for them during their next missionary term.

One of least-helpful things people often say to missionaries on furlough is this: "Let me know how I can help." That places the missionary in a difficult spot – is this person just saying that to be kind? Do they really want to hear about our deepest frustrations and concerns right now? Are they asking to be on our support team?

A better idea would be to choose 1-2 practical ways to refresh the hearts of the missionary saints among you. Pray for them. Invest in their ministry. Become personally invested in their lives and in their ministry. Take the challenge: dare to be a Philemon to a missionary. I bet you'll be glad you did.

Source: <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2014/11/04/20-ways-to-refresh-the-hearts-of-the-missionary-saints-on-furlough/>