


How To Unpack From Camp

For Parents

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Your son or daughter will be coming home from camp soon.

In addition to shirts, pants, and underwear they will be unpacking their problems, victories, and emotions. When they arrive home and experience reentry into the reality of life, they will need a little help. Reentry can be a delicate time. Look over these instructions as you help your child unpack from camp.

1. What You Should Unpack Before Your Package Arrives

- Expectations – Remind yourself that this is a journey and your child will spend the rest of his or her Christian life unpacking what God has put in them – and so will you.
- Understanding – When your child doesn't live up to his or her expectations and becomes discouraged, offer a listening ear, not a condemning finger.
- A Heart For New Beginnings – Whatever has happened in past should remain there. Your child may be bringing back some new commitments – you could also make some new commitments and join the journey with him or her. Let the arguments and face offs of the past remain in the past. Coming home from camp is a great opportunity to start fresh.

2. Your Package Arrives: Handle With Care

No one will be more excited about camp than your child. If your child has never been to camp before, get ready for a few stories. If they are in junior high grab a seat because they won't stop talking! Start to unpack slowly. Take all the "big items" out first. They will want to talk about the Blob™ they might have jumped on, all the fun games they played, and the late night shaving cream fight none of the counselors knew about. Rejoice with them over meal times, and maybe when they arrive arrange a special dinner out. Make sure you allow your son or daughter to unpack in their own time, but questions about the big stuff are okay to begin with.

3. Small Pieces May Cause Choking

While unpacking, (which may take a few weeks) look for "small pieces" of the story. Some students are not very talkative about their spiritual moments while others make it the centerpiece of their conversations. They may mention the services at night or the daily devotion. If they like to write, you may want to present them with a journal to record all their moments. (If you are reading this article before they go to camp, buy them a journal and pack it

off with them.) Ask them to share their favorite yet not too personal moments with you when they get back. Pick up on the “small pieces” of their camp experience such as a counselor they keep mentioning or a favorite song they learned at camp and now hum around the house. Use that as a catalyst for further discussion about spiritual things.

4. Maintenance For Your New or Refurbished Student

Parents often ask the question, “How do I keep my kid on track?” Post-camp life can be traumatic. The commitments they made will be tested. The devil does not want them to succeed in following God. The feelings of guilt are magnified in the life of a young person. They see themselves as strong people; and when they act in opposition to the commitment they’ve made, they are prone to give up or to believe they just don’t “have it.” A few Scriptures to have handy are Romans 7:15, 1 John 1:9 and Romans 8:1.

5. Call The Shipping Dept. If You Have Any Problems

If you experience any problems unpacking your package call “shipping” – your youth pastor and youth leaders. What problems might you experience?

- Extremism – Your child might adopt unbiblical, extreme views about their culture and even toward some lifestyles in their family. They might think to themselves, “They (family, friends, etc) are not living the Christian life like I think they should.” Remind them God’s grace and love for them, and that same grace and love should be given to others.
- Fascination With End Times – It’s not unusual that the Book of Revelations or the Second Coming of Christ comes up at camp. This can produce an unnatural fear or curiosity about the return of Christ. The antidote for this is to focus on the person of Christ. When the disciples became interested in the time of Christ’s return, Jesus turned their focus to the task at hand – being His witnesses (Acts 1:4-8).
- No Change At All – Camp might have no apparent effect. Your student may come back with no new convictions. Remember, camp does not change kids – God does. God will not give up on all the seeds planted in your student’s heart; they will flourish and grow.

If you are committed to your child’s spiritual growth I can guarantee a few things: God is committed to you and your family’s success; your youth pastor cares about your child’s spiritual growth; and you will still have to do lots of laundry when they return! The only thing I cannot guarantee about your “package” is their time of delivery. Enjoy the ride!