

WHY IN THE WORLD DO WE DO VBS AFTERALL?!?

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WHY VBS?

Do you ever wonder why your church does VBS? Seriously! Sure, it is fun and there are some great chances to enjoy the kids. Oh – yes – and also there’s those cool snacks! But really – why do VBS?

In real terms, as most Southern Baptists know, Vacation Bible School is still, with all of the other things going on in church life in the 21st Century, the most effective tool we have to reach boys and girls for Jesus! For churches that want to make it happen, it can be a major opportunity to reach kids, families, and their community for Jesus

Sadly, this doesn’t happen the way it should in many, many churches across our state and across our country. In order to make it so, we have to make a plan to maximize all that we do with and for children in VBS. And the very best way to do that is to find ways to connect with their parents and families.

WHAT ABOUT THE PARENTS?

Has your church considered the current state of parenting in our society today – not just “faith parenting” – all parenting? Look around you. Watch parents and families in your community – at sports events, at social activities, in the grocery store, at the local fast food restaurant. How are the parents of preschoolers and children in your church and community doing regarding their parenting role and skills? What are some things that you have noticed seem to be missing in their daily practice of their responsibilities? And exactly what is the role of a parent supposed to be, relating to what God has planned and instructed for the family for the best benefit to the children?

An answer requires a check of scripture to see what God’s instruction book says about the role parents fill. God is pretty clear that parents are responsible to guide and train and direct and disciple their children in all areas, including the faith arena! For example, just check the following familiar verses for a few of many scriptures which emphasize this role: Genesis 18:19, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Proverbs 22:6, Isaiah 52:13. For kids who come from non-Christian homes, that job falls heavily on those of us who love Him and who love children to be change agents for the families so they have the opportunities for this to occur. For kids who come from Christian homes, that job falls to the parents, many of whom are not doing that job.

What keeps Christian parents from fulfilling this important parenting role according to God’s plan? We know of many, many factors, such as time issues with their busy schedules and stress, a lack of awareness, lack of commitment to role, no faith foundation or no spiritual growth themselves, a culture that constantly works against them. Couple those with the fact that we live in an era in which many of our adults see things of the church and faith as “foreign” topics with which they are completely unfamiliar and we begin to see that there’s no common ground between these parents and the church.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Knowing these things, how can we better maximize our investment in VBS to make it all it should be? Because, honestly, otherwise, what's the point?! After all, kids can go just about any program or event in the community and get great activities, have fun and excitement, do cool crafts, enjoy yummy snacks, and participate in exciting recreation opportunities. And many of these options have great, involved adult leadership. Church should be different, better, more special than anywhere else. It is only at church, only in VBS, only during this special, amazing time each year that many kids and families can experience all that God wants to accomplish because of a church's full commitment to this unique summertime event. Only at church can they hear the story of salvation and come to know about the living Lord Jesus. Only at church can truths be introduced which will give them much more than a great week in the summer – it could change their lives – and their eternities!

WOW!! If this is the case, how can we better plan and implement our VBS in order to touch boys and girls today, touch their families, and impact their futures? This takes commitment – to accept the responsibility, to embrace the privilege, and to make a plan so that excellence can happen. Our churches (you, me, all of us) must be willing to commit to some significant concepts in order to have the best impact possible through VBS. Every other arena in kids and families' lives make no apology for requiring involvement and inclusion of the parents in activities provided for their children. Churches should be willing to care enough to do the same!

A FEW HELPFUL TIPS

Consider a few things that churches can do in order to make VBS this year a connecting tool for their community. Each area will require its own plan – but each area is worth the effort:

a. Readiness – is your church READY? – Really?

Is there churchwide support and involvement in preparing? (this isn't just a "kids' event")

Is the church staff fully committed to help make it happen? (from the pastor through every member, there should be a sense of ownership and excitement and a willingness for each staff person to become personally involved)

Are there budget funds to purchase needed materials? (good curriculum, snacks, activity-art supplies cost money!)

Is there clean, welcoming, adequate space for kids to have a positive learning environment? (children deserve the best space we have available as they study and learn about Jesus)

b. Parent possibilities – are you willing to make this a family experience?

Can you encourage parents to come and learn and participate? (remember – to maximize our ministry to children, we have to be willing to connect with their parents, who are with them the most and have the greatest influence)

Will someone teach either the adult VBS material or a parenting class? (providing something of quality for kids' parents is a win-win-win: for the church, for the parents – for the kids!)

Is there someone who will plan at least one family activity related to VBS? (a kick-off picnic, a mid-week hot dog roast, an ice cream party at the end?) Will other “church” parents, who are active and involved, be willing to participate in all activities in order to get to know those parents who aren’t usual attendees? (one-on-one relationships built during the week can be nurtured throughout the year)

c. Follow-up –does your church see these children as worthy of ongoing ministry?

What is the plan for what should occur after VBS? (if there isn’t a plan, nothing will be done – part of VBS is prioritizing follow-up)

Are S.S. teachers given the names and information about the VBS visiting children so that they can assume some responsibility for connecting with them? (VBS teachers can even partner with SS teachers to do so)

Are adult S.S. teachers given them names of the families so they can make efforts to connect? (SS class parties, great SS lessons, sermon emphases, upcoming churchwide events – all of these are excellent ways to keep reaching the VBS families)

d. Pray! – we know God wants these children and families to know Him – let’s invite Him to lead us in this eternity-altering effort!

Pray for each part of this important experience – the preparation, the leaders and teachers, the church members who will host kids and families, the children who will attend, their parents and siblings, safety and good experiences during the week, a commitment to follow-up, and for God to be honored by the way we do His work.

If you do these things – you can be sure you will have **the best VBS ever** at your church! And more importantly, you can be sure that boys, girls, parents, whole families, and your church body will **know and love the Lord more** than before. That’s what makes **VBS the best week of the summer!!**