

# Vacation Bible School: Do's and Don'ts

Steve Burchett

Months of planning precede it. A line item in the church's budget often funds it. Most churches hosting it see these few days every year as a prime opportunity to evangelize children. For some, it's the most tiring event of the year. Of course, I'm talking about Vacation Bible School (VBS).

The hope in all of the hours of preparation and execution is for children to hear the Gospel and come to faith in Christ. No one can make even one child a believer since it is God alone who makes Christians, but there are a few VBS "do's" and "don'ts" that are vital for us to heed if we truly desire to drive children *to*, not away from, the Savior.

## Five "Do's"

**Do use curriculum that is biblical and precise with the gospel.** Ask yourself, "Is this curriculum simply about morals like 'Be nice to your sister,' or does it deal with the Bible and what it says about the character of God (even His wrath), the sinfulness of man, and the cross of Christ?" For a solid example of this, visit [www.childrendesiringgod.org](http://www.childrendesiringgod.org).



**Do make sure that every teacher is precise with the gospel.** You may have excellent curriculum, but if a teacher doesn't handle the Bible accurately, the truth will be distorted. We don't want our children to hear a false gospel, do we? Remember Paul's sobering and stern words in Galatians 1:8, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"

**Do sing appropriate songs.** VBS is not primarily a gathering of believers. Therefore, it is inappropriate for the children to sing lyrics like, "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord." Instead, sing songs that speak about God's character and the saving work of Christ. For examples of songs like this, visit [www.sovereigngraceministries.org](http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org).

**Do send gospel literature home with the children.** A large number of the children at VBS have unbelieving parents. Sending home a sheet summarizing the day's lesson with a few Scriptures for the child and parent(s) to look up together is appropriate. On the final day, send them home with an evangelistic book (like *Pursuing God* or *The Eaglet*, available at [www.ccwonline.org](http://www.ccwonline.org)) and a note encouraging parents to read it with them.

**Do listen to and laugh with the children.** There must be times of seriousness—We dare not treat the gospel trivially! However, children need to know that we care about them and that serious Christians also have a sense of humor.

## Five "Don'ts"

**Don't confuse the children concerning what is the necessary response to the gospel.** The proper response to the gospel is not raising a hand, walking an aisle, or even praying a correctly worded prayer. The necessary response is repentance and faith (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21).

**Don't constantly tell the children how great they are.** Even if the children obey perfectly all week, apart from Christ they remain enemies of God, and they need to know this. The "self-esteem" teaching of our day, if embraced by VBS teachers, actually works against the children recognizing their need for a Savior. Commend them when appropriate, but don't shield them from the truth about their sin nature.

**Don't expect to know for sure if even one child was saved.** Certain denominational newsletters highlight the number of children who are supposedly saved at VBS in their respective churches, but how do they really know? They are probably basing their statistics on hands raised, aisles walked, or prayers prayed, but we can't really know that a child has been saved until fruit appears. In John 10:26, Jesus said that a characteristic of His sheep is that they "follow" Him. Is it possible to know, by the end of VBS week, that a child has *definitely* become a follower of Christ? Keep preaching the gospel to the children beyond VBS, look for ongoing repentance and faith, and forget about denominational fame.

**Don't seek to assure a child that he or she is a Christian.** We can give children the biblical basis upon which they can have assurance, but the Holy Spirit alone grants assurance. "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

**Don't think VBS is essential in the church's life.** There are many good churches who have never held a VBS, yet they are abundantly evangelistic! How is this possible? They take the command seriously to "Go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19), but they spread the gospel through other means. Evangelism is essential, VBS is not. However, God might lead your church to host a VBS. If so, be careful to drive children *to* the Savior.

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