

Now that Vacation Bible School is Over . . .

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Once VBS is over for the year, what strategies characterize your church's follow-up with the children who attended? Methodologies abound, but let's evaluate two of the most common.

“Our job is done. It's up to their parents now.”

Perhaps this strategy will not be verbalized, but after a week of exhausting and sometimes exhilarating ministry to children, even the most energetic children's worker needs a break. And, yes, Scripture clearly teaches that parents are responsible to bring their children up “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Thankfully, God has given to some children parents whose passion burns fervently for Christ.

Children need godly parents caring for them, teaching them the Bible, and demonstrating a life of worship much more than they need a spectacular week of VBS.



However, we live in a day when the majority of children come from distressed homes. Many of our VBS kids face obvious dysfunctions such as difficulties arising from divorce or abuse. These are ordinary scenarios in homes where the adults are unbelievers. Even in “decent” homes of church-going families, children often have parents who are more committed to their athletic prowess or schoolwork success than they are zealous for their children to know and follow Christ.

The church cannot ignore the children in these situations. We must seek to “deliver those who are being taken away to death” (Proverbs 24:11). Many attend VBS and never intend to come back. Proclaiming the gospel to these dear children a few days a year is not enough. Perhaps some were genuinely interested in the Bible's teaching about peace with God through faith in Christ, and maybe even experienced sorrow for their sinfulness. Could we honestly say that further contact with these children is unnecessary because “our job is done”? Should we be more concerned about a crisp production of VBS or the changed lives of children?

Furthermore, the unbelieving parents of children need the gospel. Since they sent a child (or children) to VBS, the Lord might provide wide open doors into their homes and lives for the purpose of telling *them* about Christ. Even those parents who regularly attend church services may not have a clear understanding of the gospel, and we should pray for and seek opportunities to address their imprecision and confusion.

“Let's hurry to baptize the children who were saved.”

God may save many children during VBS. In fact, we pray that He would empower the teaching of the gospel and open their hearts to receive the Word we proclaim. And we are responsible to baptize those who have believed in Christ (the clear pattern in Acts is for baptism to *follow* repentance and faith in Christ). The struggle with a child who professes faith in Christ is *knowing* whether or not he or she has genuinely come to Christ.

“But baptism in Acts followed immediately after someone began believing!” you reason. That is a true statement, but here are a few points to ponder concerning the baptisms in Acts: First, there is no explicit record that children were baptized. Second, there would have been little question about the legitimacy of the conversion of those we read about in Acts—one who chose to follow Christ and be baptized was making a radical departure from the culture and indicating that he or she was a legitimate convert. Finally, there is no direct command to baptize *immediately*.

By delaying baptism, we are not telling a child, “You are converted, but you must wait for baptism.” Rather, we are addressing a child's *hopeful* conversion with caution and patience, recognizing the church's responsibility to baptize true converts. It seems that more damage would be done by baptizing a false convert (giving false assurance, contributing to an unregenerate church membership, damaging the church's witness in the community, etc.) than by postponing the baptism of a child who, we eventually find out, was truly converted at a young age.

Furthermore, we should remember that children can be easily deceived about where they stand with God. First Corinthians 14:20 highlights the immaturity of a child's thinking when Paul writes, “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.” Also, unlike adults, children normally don't have the experiences of life that allow us to witness the real fruit of a true Christian. That is the major concern when considering baptizing anyone, not just a child—Does this person have life from God? Is she persevering in repentance and faith? Does he act like a true Christian and obey the Word of God? Is this person a disciple of Christ? (cf. Matthew 28:19).

Delaying baptism cannot rob a child of salvation. If God has truly saved a child, there is nothing we can do to alter His handiwork. What we can do is respond to a child's hopeful conversion with love, encouragement, and further teaching. We should give them the basis upon which they can have assurance, encourage them to keep trusting in Christ, see how they respond when they realize that it truly costs them to be a Christian, and baptize them when the fruit of repentance is revealed.

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