

# TBN set to serve fresh VeggieTales

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For Millennial parents who want to serve their children fresh VeggieTales prepared according to the original recipe, to quote Bob the Tomato, “Have we got a show for you.”

The classic Christian children’s program—which debuted in 1993 as a series of direct-to-videotape shows featuring Bible stories, silly songs and off-beat humor—will return with new episodes on Trinity Broadcasting Network developed by the original creative team.

“We’re putting the old band back together,” said Phil Vischer, who co-created the series with partner Mike Nawrocki and provided the voice of Bob the Tomato. Nawrocki reprises his role as Larry the Cucumber, and Vischer’s wife Lisa returns as Junior Asparagus.

## Back to basics

The company Vischer and Nawrocki formed—Big Idea Productions—went bankrupt in 2003. VeggieTales changed hands three times before ending up as an NBCUniversal property. Along the way, new episodes produced without the guiding hand of the original creators lost the series’ distinctively Christian identity.



Phil Vischer

Vischer moved on to other projects, such as the “What’s in the Bible” 13-volume DVD series. Then he received a call from TBN, which already had talked with NBCUniversal about licensing the [VeggieTales](#) show with new episodes.

TBN wanted Bob the Tomato to return, but Vischer told the network he was interested in the role only if he and Nawrocki had creative input and if the program remained “true to the brand.”

“I received no pushback at all,” Vischer said. “TBN wanted to take VeggieTales back to its earlier, simpler feel.”

The network assured him it wanted a program that captured the distinctive nature of the original series, including its creators’ commitment to teaching biblical values, he said. So, Vischer and his creative team from the 1990s agreed to introduce Bob, Larry and their friends to a new generation.

## **‘Everybody learns something’**

“VeggieTales meant so much to so many families,” Vischer said. “Now the first round of viewers are having kids of their own.”



A VeggieTales Christmas special, “The Best Christmas Gift,” will appear on the Trinity Broadcasting Network in late fall, and it also will be distributed on DVD. (Image courtesy of VeggieTales)

The new show follows a variety show format, inspired by Jim Henson’s “The Muppet Show” of the late 1970s. Each episode begins with a question raised by a kid, and the VeggieTales characters then “put on a show” to answer that question.

“One character’s answer will be hilariously off-base. Then a Bible story provides the real answer. In the process, everybody learns something, including Bob,” Vischer said.

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That will lead into 18 new VeggieTales episodes on the network, including nine focused on the fruit of the Spirit, as presented in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

# Simple, not simplistic

In addition to bringing back VeggieTales, Vischer also has produced a Bible storybook for children, [\*The Laugh 'N' Learn Bible for Kids\*](#).



“I think somebody in marketing came up with the title,” he said. “It’s not about making the Bible funny. It’s about making the Bible accessible and enjoyable.”

Rather than just presenting random Bible “snapshots,” the book presents 52 stories that present the “big picture” of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, he explained.

“It includes talking about the sad parts, the gloomy parts” in age-appropriate ways, he added.

Vischer hopes it will provide the “connective tissue” to help children understand how the Bible stories fit together into an overall story of redemption.

“It’s not simplistic, but it’s presented in a simple way. ... It’s taking rich teaching and theology, and then putting it on a lower shelf where kids can reach it,” Vischer said.

“I want to help kids find their place in God’s story.”