

# **Commentary: 10 reasons not to do VBS in your church**

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As a pastor, I always looked forward to Vacation Bible School. It was a great opportunity to interact with the children and adults in our church, reach families in our community and share the gospel. It was one of my favorite weeks of the year.

That being said, there are some good reasons not to do Vacation Bible School. Here are just a few.

## **1. Don't do Vacation Bible School unless you are ready to welcome children and families from your community.**

Vacation Bible School is a great week for the children and families in your church, but it is also a great opportunity to invite children from the community to come get to know you better and learn God's word in the process. If that is not something your church is ready to do, you should consider whether you really want to do it.

## **2. Don't do Vacation Bible School if you are just going to engage people who already are working in your children's ministry.**

People who work with children every week in Sunday school or other children's programs sometimes get burned out. VBS is a great time to involve other people in your church family who may not work with children on a regular basis but may be a great resource for that week and beyond.

### **3. Don't do Vacation Bible School if you don't have anything to offer the children after the week is over.**

The week of VBS should be a good introduction to other ministries the church offers children and not just a standalone exception to an otherwise inactive children's ministry. It is an ideal time to invite children back for Sunday school, children's worship or other activities.

### **4. Don't do Vacation Bible School if you don't plan to share the gospel with the children and their families.**

As great as it is to have lots of children participating in VBS, it is a lost opportunity if we don't make an intentional effort to share the gospel in an age-appropriate way for children to hear and respond to. As a pastor, I knew every year I would have the chance to talk with children about their understanding of the gospel and see some of them baptized as a result.

### **5. Don't do Vacation Bible School if you aren't going to make it fun.**

VBS is a great time of active worship, recreation and interactive learning that should be fun for the adults and the children. Where else do children get to play games and see adults in such an informal setting doing things they don't normally do in church and wearing something other than church clothes? It should be fun for everyone.

### **6. Don't do Vacation Bible School if it is just about the decorations and fun theme songs instead of teaching God's word.**

We cannot lose sight of the goal of teaching children the truth of God's word through this week. It can be easy to get caught up in all the décor and theme and forget why we are there. This is where good teacher and worker training makes a huge difference.

## **7. Don't do Vacation Bible School if that is the week the pastor or staff plan to go on vacation.**

I always was surprised to hear pastors and other staff members joke they were planning to be gone on vacation during the week of Vacation Bible School. I was shocked even more to find out they really meant it.

VBS is a team effort. It is important that the pastor and staff are visible during the week so children can see people they see up front on Sundays working as part of the team.

## **8. Don't do Vacation Bible School if you aren't going to train and screen the workers to prevent sexual abuse.**

As wonderful as it is to have involved new people working with children during the week of Vacation Bible School, it also presents a dangerous opportunity for those who want to abuse or harm children.

It is imperative that everyone who works in VBS go through the same background checks, screening and training in how to prevent sexual abuse as those who may work in children's ministry throughout the year. In addition, the church should have clear policies and guidelines for workers that will protect children and minimize risk.

## **9. Don't do Vacation Bible School if you aren't going to follow up afterwards with the children and families who attend.**

After VBS is over, every family who had a child attend should receive a thank-you letter, an invitation to upcoming children's activities, and/or a phone call or contact from someone in the church. The more personal this follow-up is, the better.

## **10. Don't do Vacation Bible School if you aren't going to bathe it in prayer.**

Our church has a prayer team that prays for the teachers, workers, children and families through the week of Vacation Bible School. It is yet another opportunity for people to be involved who may not be able to participate in any other way. Prayer is an essential part of the spiritual outcomes we hope to see through Vacation Bible School.

I hope your church will do Vacation Bible School in whatever way is best for your church and community. Whether that is in the morning, at night, with another outreach effort like sports or music, or even through the summer on a weeknight, it is worth all the effort it takes.

Vacation Bible School is a lot of work and requires a lot of resources both in terms of people and finances, but that is not one of the reasons not to do it. All of that pales in comparison with reaching children with the gospel.

*David Johnson is executive director of Arizona Mission Network of Southern Baptists. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.*