

Why We Do VBS

Sunday, July 23, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa
Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 24:32-35

- Introduction: VBS is hard. Why is it worth it?

Every year, the biggest and hardest project takes place in the Summer, usually near the end of July or the beginning of August. It is Vacation Bible School. Starting tonight, and going through Thursday night, upwards of 60 children from the church and neighborhood will gather for skits, music, games, snacks and stories from the Bible. I don't know how many hours people give in preparation for this. People, in addition to manning different roles in the program, give a variety of donations to make sure that everything is in order once VBS begins. It is the most labor-intensive event on our annual schedule. What's the point? Why do we go through so much bother? Some churches partner together with other churches because they cannot do it on their own, and some churches don't do it some years because of all the work. Is it really worth it? Does the Bible say anything about things like VBS?

- Set the Stage:

Deuteronomy 6

I would say, "yes." Not that the phrase "Vacation Bible School" is in the Bible, but making a special effort to teach children the Word of God is. One of the most sacred passages in Sacred Text is Deuteronomy 6, starting with verse four. It says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." Now note the first practical point of obedience in this passage: "You shall teach them diligently to your children." This epic statement of belief in the Old Testament has teaching Scripture to children as our first point of response. There are others like it. Teaching children Scripture is a major priority in the Bible.

Hebrews 4:12

It should be noted as well that Scripture, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, is potent. There's that famous passage in Hebrews 4:12 that tells us that the word of God is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." There is power and discernment in the Scripture. They can reveal to you the depths of your own heart.

Isaiah & Matthew 24

The great prophet Isaiah wrote that the Word of God is like rain or like snow up in the mountains. They melt and drain and eventually evaporate but it always accomplishes its purpose. It does what it needs to do. The result is often not evident immediately, but the moisture waters the earth and causes plants to grow. People in the Middle East have noted that even dry arid areas can sprout vegetation quickly when rains do come. The Word of God is like that. It has power and creates change. The Holy Spirit can use it to bring about new life in a person, sometimes years after they hear it. Isaiah spoke these words in the context of prophecy, of things yet to come and the Lord Jesus echoes him in Matthew 24, that even in the ages to come the truth of Scripture will be valid and relevant.

- Main Point: Per Divine Conspiracy, teach what is relevant. Scripture is always relevant.

When someone learns Sacred Scripture, they learn truth that is relevant forever. When they learn the Word of God, they learn information that changes them, in fact, that was the point. I read recently in a book called "The Divine Conspiracy" by Dallas Willard, that education was not simply information transfer without any application (think "Trivial Pursuit"). Education in the days of Jesus was to inspire and cause change, it was not simply to collect information. Jesus would not share what is not relevant.

Willard wrote, "We must recognize, first of all, that the aim of the popular teacher in Jesus' time was not to import information, but to make a significant change in the lives of the hearers. Of course, that may require an information transfer, but it is a particularly modern notion that the aim of teaching is to bring people to know things that may have no effect at all on their lives."* What we learn in church, in Bible studies and yes, in VBS, is information that was relevant in ancient times, it is relevant now, it will be relevant forever. That is why VBS is worth it.

- Application: Cherish VBS. cf. the missionary children of Indonesia

Here's the application. Cherish VBS. Appreciate the value of VBS and that during VBS children associate fun and joy with church, they feel (or should feel) loved at church and they learn the forever valuable stories of the Bible in church. Yes, breathe a sigh of relief when it is over, but cherish VBS. I remember a friend who spent several years as a missionary, along with his wife and four children, in Indonesia. He told me a story about an adventure in the mountains. Several missionary children, including his own, travelled far into a remote village to help with one of the most important events of the year for that village. They were going to help lead Vacation Bible School. They had a translator from the village dialect, but they had to lead the VBS in Indonesian. The parents were all busy with their own mission work so the children, some in their pre-teen years, went without them. Children were hungry for the Word of God and VBS addresses that all over the world.

- Conclusion

VBS is hard work. I don't think that we could do it more than once a year, and everyone breathes a sigh of relief when it is over. The phrase "Vacation Bible School" isn't in the Bible, but the idea of presenting children with the wisdom of Scripture is, and it is a priority. The Bible is God's Word, and as such it is relevant. It was relevant in ancient times, it is relevant now, and it will be relevant forever. VBS is worth the effort.

*page 128, The Diving Conspiracy Dallas Willard William Collins Press London 2014