

Title: "The Hometown Camp With a Difference" or  
"My Kids are at Camp...Just Down the Street"

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Making plans for summer? Don't send your kids away, at least not too far. If you want your children to have an exciting summer that can make a difference in their future and you are not ready for them to be away at camp for a whole week, send them to Vacation Bible School! The church right down the street might have a Vacation Bible School program your kids will love to attend. Young lives are literally changed for eternity because of the impact of Vacation Bible School, just like a hometown camp with a difference.

VBS is here today (during the summer months) and gone in September, VBS is known as special religious education, catering toward children. VBS has always been a part of my life, I attended as a child, sent my children as a mother with young children and as a mother with older children, volunteered. I love VBS. I'm not sure what part of it is my favorite...the entertaining Bible stories and verse memorization, the hilarious skits, the varied themes, the rowdy games, the impressive crafts, the fun camaraderie or the yummy snacks.

Vacation Bible School's origins trace back to Hopedale, Illinois in 1894 created by a public school teacher, who felt limited in time constraints with teaching the Bible to children. Four years later, Eliza Hawes, director of the children's department at Epiphany Baptist Church in New York City started an "Everyday Bible School" for slum children at a rented beer parlor in New York's East Side.

From a beer parlor in New York to local backyards, today many churches run their own Vacation Bible School programs on their own church property. Some use curriculum from their denominations or publishing houses such as Gospel Light, Group or David C. Cook. The ready-made materials include easy preparation with fun themes, music, Bible story and skit ideas and marketing tools provided. Although there is a possibility of another nearby church using the same program, children have benefited by attending multiple consecutive programs, already familiar with the Bible stories, music and flow of the program.

Most Vacation Bible Schools are totally staffed by volunteers and offer a weeklong program consisting of religious education, skits, puppet shows, arts and crafts, and religious songs catering toward elementary aged children. The programming is geared to the attention level of the children, usually fast moving and multi-faceted to keep their interest. Customarily, Vacation Bible School begins with registration in the

morning at 8:30, as children are used to getting up and going to school, the programming usually ends at noon. Due to working mothers and a volunteer shortage, a few churches are holding evening meetings which may be the same segment of time, about three hours, but possibly more family oriented, including programming for children and adults. A proposed schedule might begin at 5:30 pm and end at 8:30 pm, with dinner and programming included for all family members.

Some churches may charge fees at a rate competitive with other summer camp programs and use VBS as an evangelistic outreach, while others offer a free service to educate children. A group of local churches that do not have the resources to run VBS for the entire summer may coordinate their schedules providing continuous childcare as a service to the community. Other churches might coordinate their VBS curriculums and themes with successive weeks in a row of their combined summer schedules to enable them to share curriculum, resources and even volunteer staff. This saves both time and money for those who are involved in planning the often-elaborate sets, skits and decorations for the different themes. As Director of Development and Public Relations at KAXL 88.3 FM Music For Life, I visit Vacation Bible Schools during the summer for live reports on location. Last year's theme included Gospel Light's "Son Treasure Island" curriculum, several of the churches I visited shared stage props like costumes, palm trees, island huts and even a pirate ship - I saw the same palm tree at three different VBS sites - now that's unity!

Often during VBS, teachers find out where the kids are spiritually and many life decisions are made, it is a time when kids open up about their spiritual needs and home situations. Researcher, George Barna says, "Of all American who call themselves 'born again,' 43% made their profession of faith before age 13. And these younger converts are more likely to describe themselves as deeply spiritual." Certainly kids make a profession of faith in Sunday school also, but VBS is the time when more children take a step in that direction than in any other program. These commitments truly make an impact for life.

Do you want your children to have a summer that can impact their future? Are you not ready for them to be away at camp for a whole week? Send them to the hometown camp with a difference...send them to Vacation Bible School. Coming soon to a LOCAL church near you!

For details on upcoming Vacation Bible School programs, check out the Community Calendar at Kern County Family Magazine or online at [www.KAXL.com](http://www.KAXL.com) or email Sheryl Giesbrecht at [Sheryl@KAXL.com](mailto:Sheryl@KAXL.com).

Sidebar: VBS Songs You Might Remember...

- [If You're Happy and You Know It](#)
- [Jesus Loves Me](#)
- [Jesus Loves the Little Children](#)
- This Little Light of Mine