

VBS training to take place March 8-9

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For the last few years, if you were at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center on the first weekend of March, you would find enthusiastic adults making costumes out of toilet paper, singing karaoke songs, and playing giant inflatable games. But, you would also see those same adults singing and doing motions as they worship. And, most importantly, you would notice them listening and taking notes as they attended our annual VBS Kickoff.

This year's VBS Kickoff will take place March 8-9 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton. Leaders who teach preschoolers and children are invited to preview the Bible study and decorations for this year's VBS, while focusing on the importance of reaching out and sharing the gospel through VBS.

Some might see VBS Kickoff weekend as just a fun time for VBS leaders to get familiar with whatever the theme for VBS is that year. But, we know from research that much more is going on.

A national VBS statistics study from Lifeway, *VBS, a Most Effective Evangelism*, shares these inspiring statistics about VBS and VBS training:

- Twenty five percent of baptisms reported by the SBC each year come from VBS. This has held true for Mississippi for several years.
- VBS across the country has been reporting an annual

enrollment between 2 and 3 million people. In 2022 (our most current numbers), Mississippi reported at least 900 churches who held VBS, with nearly 5400 VBS enrollees.

- Ten percent of VBS enrollees are unchurched. The mission field through Vacation Bible School is wide open in Mississippi.
- Every one leader trained in VBS results in 1.1 salvation decisions. In Mississippi, over the last decade, we have trained at least 350-400 of our VBS leaders annually at our VBS Kickoff and other associational trainings. Think of the salvation decisions that represents!

In Luke chapters 5 through 8 we see Jesus “training” his disciples, culminating in chapter 9 when he sent them out to share the gospel. By then, He had shown them who He was through parables, healing, and real life situations.

That is absolutely what we hope to reflect at our VBS training events. Our message to Mississippi leaders is that VBS is ultimately supposed to lead kids to Jesus. Leaders learn to share the gospel through Bible Study and worship, but they also hear about the importance of using music, crafts, games, and snacks to tell kids about the love of Jesus. And then they are sent out to show kids around the state who Jesus is and how He can change their lives.

At First Church, Starkville, last summer, preschoolers wrote “Jesus Loves You” cards in their music rotation. The children were instructed to hand them out to people they met. Two kindergartners gave a card to a young woman at the movie theater ticket counter. The woman began to cry, telling the girls that she had a terrible morning and really needed to hear the message that she was loved. These two young children were able to reach out to someone because a VBS leader who was trained on the real meaning of VBS taught them more than music.

VBS training helps leaders know the importance of dealing with whoever comes to VBS. Much of what is taught in breakout sessions at the Kickoff centers around building relationships.

Last summer in Meridian, a second-grader attended Poplar Springs Drive VBS for the first time ever. This young girl was extremely curious when teachers told her that God loves everyone and that she could be with him in Heaven. She had lots of questions about a brother who had recently died and a dad who professed to be an atheist, but she couldn't even understand what sin was because she came from a home where God's love was never mentioned.

Patient and loving teachers and church leaders, because of their VBS training, continued to talk with her and answer her questions, even after VBS was over. This past December, she prayed to ask Jesus into her heart. Her mom has gotten involved at the church, and now they are praying for her dad.

Not only does VBS training help teachers know how to answer questions about God and share the gospel, it often trickles down to the kids who attend VBS.

The Children's Ministry of First Church, Booneville, led their 6th graders to give out food at a local food bank. The kids also gave out invites for VBS the following week. One of the girls from the church recognized a classmate at the food bank and gave him an invite. He came to VBS and was saved that week. To this day, that young man is still an active part of their youth group.

When leaders learn about ways to promote VBS, they influence the kids at their church to reach out to others as well. VBS training can impact churches and entire families for years to come.

A few years back at Liberty Baptist, Flowood, a preschooler came to VBS through their bus ministry. After VBS, she started coming to Sunday school and Mission Friends. After a couple of

years of coming to VBS programs, her mom started coming to church. She got involved and was saved. The girl's dad came to the mom's baptism and was drawn to start coming to church as well. Soon, he was saved and baptized too!

At VBS training, we encourage teachers to continue making connections with families beyond the week of Vacation Bible School. As one of our trainers said, "It's my goal to plant seeds," and we hope that we see fruit for a long time to come.

For more information or to register for the VBS training weekend, [click here](#).