

MOMENTS THAT MATTER:

How to Create a Life-Changing VBS Experience

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What Will Kids Remember About Your VBS?

Your church puts in hours upon hours of work to engage your community through Vacation Bible School.

You search for the right curriculum.

You mobilize and train volunteers.

You decorate your church to make an impact.

You invite kids—and teach them truth from God's Word.

But have you ever stopped and wondered:

ARE YOU MAKING AN IMPACT?

Of course, you want to make an impact. We all do. No one wants to put all that work in just to have it forgotten in 24 hours. That's a waste—and not a great stewardship of the time we're given with kids during VBS.

But the reality is, much of what you do during VBS won't stick in the kids' memory for the length of time it takes for them to get into their parents' car—much less for years to come.

Just ask someone who preaches weekly. Most people don't remember what they hear from week to week. It's the sad reality for most preachers—and VBS directors.

The people we want to reach remember snippets, mere moments.



Moments That Matter

We remember moments, not minutes—and certainly not hours. It's those moments that make an impact on our lives. Those moments are when we decide to pop the question to our spouse, hold our firstborn for the initial time, or make a forever friend.

And among them is also the moment we decide to follow Jesus and begin that journey of faith that changes all of us.

According to *The Power of Moments* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, a defining moment is a short experience that is both memorable and meaningful. It doesn't need to be long—even brief experiences can leave a lasting impact. Some defining moments are life-changing, capturing who we are or who we become. Others are smaller but still powerful, shaping how we remember a particular day, event, or season of life.

Ask an adult about their childhood church experience; they may not recall every lesson or sermon. But they will remember the moment they were prayed over, the time they felt truly welcomed, or the excitement of a lesson that made the Bible come alive. That's what we're after in VBS—not just filling time but creating moments that shape faith for years to come.

These moments aren't just emotional highs—they're spiritual milestones that reinforce what kids are learning. They happen when a Bible story suddenly feels personal, when a child experiences God's love in a tangible way, or when they take their first step toward faith. VBS should be designed to maximize these moments—not just through lessons but through experiences that leave lasting impressions. These are the experiences that resonate deeply, even if the details are forgotten, and they shape the way children feel about God, church, and faith.



How This Guide Will Help

We've designed this guide to help you notice, create, and nurture those moments so you can help lay a foundation of faith in the lives of the kids you're reaching.

In this guide, you'll discover:

- **There are four kinds of memorable moments you should cultivate in your Vacation Bible School.**
- **Specific suggestions for implementing each of these kinds of moments into your ministry with children.**
- **A simple guide for how to leverage these moments without overwhelming the kids or your volunteers.**

Ready to brainstorm how to create the kind of VBS kids will never forget?



The Four Elements of Memorable Moments

Anytime you plan an event like Vacation Bible School, it's natural to want to create something splashy—loud music, vibrant decorations, etc.

But decades from now, it's not the spectacular children will remember. The Heath brothers describe four kinds of memorable moments that all of us are most likely to remember. Those are the moments that will lay the groundwork for the important spiritual decisions that will shape our lives.

In their book *The Power of Moments*, The Heath brothers described the building blocks of those experiences as...

ELEVATION:

These moments stand out from the every day—whether it's a joyful celebration, a powerful revelation, or an electrifying worship experience. They usually happen when we heighten our senses, add intensity to a situation, or do something unexpected.

INSIGHT:

During these times, we get clarity about ourselves and/or the world around us. These moments happen when a truth suddenly clicks—when a child sees a Bible story in a new light, realizes God's love is personal, or connects faith to their everyday life.

PRIDE:

We feel proud when we accomplish something meaningful to us. It could be reaching a big goal or showing bravery in a tough moment. In a VBS setting, that might look like a child memorizing a Bible verse, winning a game, or stepping up to perform in a skit, even when they're nervous.

CONNECTION:

Some of the most important defining moments of our lives happen with others—from weddings to baptisms to vacations and more. VBS is naturally a connection opportunity, but it isn't a given that you'll provide meaningful connection moments. You have to be intentional.

These four elements will provide the structure of this guide as we walk through how you can make them a more effective part of your vacation Bible school.

Memorable Moments in the Bible

Memorable moments aren't new in the 21st century. In fact, the Bible may have more per-page memorable moments than any book in history. Over and over in the Bible, God uses key moments to draw people into relationships. Now, to be clear, he also uses the day-to-day mundanes of life to get our attention.

It shouldn't surprise us that Deuteronomy 6 hones in on these everyday moments of faith formation as scripture teaches followers to use them to teach their children foundational truths of the faith.

"Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates."
(Deuteronomy 6:4-9, CSB)

But look a little closer, and you'll see several stories in which God clearly creates unforgettable moments in his people's journeys.

ELEVATION: Consider Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3. The story is full of sensory details. God didn't just drop Moses a note and call him to lead his people out of bondage. He lit a bush on fire that didn't burn up, engaging the senses of smell, sight, and likely touch along the way. Moses and the Israelites were never the same again. Not only did Moses have a powerful, guiding moment that clarified his call for the rest of his life—but an entire people did, too.

INSIGHT: In Matthew 16, Peter publicly testified about Jesus' identity for the first time: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"* (v. 16). That moment of clarity became such a monumental event in the apostle's life that Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter to mark it.

PRIDE: Most of the world knows the story of David and Goliath. Why? It was an accomplishment like no other. A young runt defeated one of the fiercest warriors in the known world with a slingshot and five stones. Again, that accomplishment became a defining moment for David and the people of Israel.

CONNECTION: For the disciples who had walked with Jesus for three years, the Last Supper was a shared experience so profound that they sought to imprint it on the young churches they started through the ordinance of communion.

Of course, these examples are just the start. Read through pages of scripture and you'll find many more memorable moments that stand out and made indelible marks on God-followers through the ages.

Elevation – Creating Moments that Stand Out

Moments of elevation are the ones that break the mold—they're the big, unforgettable highlights. Think of them like the best plays in a sports game—the moments everyone's still talking about long after the final whistle.

Your VBS should have those kinds of moments, too. They're the ones kids will remember when they're telling their parents all about it and sharing stories with their friends the next day. Those are the moments that those children will turn into spiritual stepping stones.

Creating a sense of elevation hinges on three elements:

BOOST SENSORY APPEAL

Boosting sensory appeal likely comes most naturally to those planning a Vacation Bible School program. Vibrant colors and thrilling decorations are common elements in VBS planning. Yet, effectively boosting sensory appeal is more about strategic intention and meaningful connection than simply boldness. Rather than overwhelming children, the best sensory experiences immerse them deeply in the narrative, fostering personal and spiritual connections.

Multi-Sensory Worship Experiences:

Thoughtfully blend music, lights, visuals, and physical movements (like hand motions or dance) to actively engage children and deepen their worship experience.

Themed Snacks:

Offer snacks that symbolically reinforce the day's Bible lessons, helping children make meaningful and memorable connections.

Distinct Sensory Zones:

Instead of extensive decorations everywhere, intentionally design specific sensory zones—quiet spaces for reflection and dynamic areas with vibrant visuals for energetic activities. *This approach is especially helpful for neurodivergent participants!*

Being selective and purposeful with sensory elements helps children connect more personally and spiritually, creating meaningful memories that last beyond VBS.

RAISE THE STAKES

Raising the stakes in your VBS isn't about creating unnecessary pressure but about infusing a sense of excitement, challenge, and meaningful achievement into each activity. Thoughtfully designed challenges or competitions can boost engagement, deepen children's sense of accomplishment, and strengthen their connection to the lessons.

Friendly Team Competitions:

Plan group activities or challenges that emphasize cooperation and teamwork, reinforcing biblical values while fostering camaraderie.

Performance Opportunities:

Give children chances to perform Bible stories, lead worship, or share testimonies, boosting their confidence and providing memorable experiences of achievement.

Goal-Oriented Activities:

Set clear, achievable goals for individual or group activities, celebrating milestones with simple yet meaningful rewards or acknowledgments, which helps accomplishments feel significant and memorable.

By intentionally and meaningfully raising the stakes, you help children experience deeper personal investment, which in turn helps them engage more effectively during VBS.





BREAK THE SCRIPT

Children are naturally curious and thrive on surprise and novelty. But truly effective surprises in VBS aren't random—they're strategic and intentionally designed to reinforce what you're teaching and create lasting memories. By thoughtfully disrupting familiar routines, you'll capture imaginations and deepen engagement in meaningful, memorable ways. Here is how you can do that smoothly.

Backwards or Inside-Out Day:

Schedule a day when regular routines run backward or in an unconventional order. Starting the day with a closing prayer or serving snacks first creates fun and memorable experiences.

Pop-up Praise Parties:

Plan spontaneous celebrations or dance breaks that surprise children during transitions, energizing them and reinforcing the joy of worship.

Surprise Guests:

Invite special guests, such as community heroes (firefighters, local athletes, or even Bible characters), whose surprise appearances spark excitement and memorable interactions.

Role Reversal Moments:

Let kids lead adult volunteers in certain activities, like teaching a memory verse or leading a game, flipping traditional roles, and creating engaging surprises.

Obviously, breaking the script when you work with kids comes with risks. Kids may like breaking the script, but they also thrive on routines. Have a plan in process on how you'll transition back into the rest of the schedule after the activity.

Insight – Creating Moments of Discovery and Understanding

Moments of insight are those transformative experiences when something clicks—children suddenly grasp a truth that resonates deeply or see themselves, others, or God in a new way. Think of insight moments as “lightbulb” experiences: they illuminate truths clearly and memorably, sticking with kids long after VBS ends.

Your VBS program can intentionally foster these powerful moments. Children naturally thrive on discovery, curiosity, and exploration, so designing your activities to promote insightful revelations can significantly impact their spiritual growth.

Creating moments of insight involves three key elements:

FACILITATE DISCOVERY

Guide children toward making their own meaningful connections and realizations rather than simply providing answers.

Interactive Story Experiences:

Use guided discussions after Bible stories to help children draw their own insights and applications rather than directly explaining every detail.

Problem-Solving Activities:

Provide scenarios or puzzles related to your lesson themes, allowing children to work together to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

Object Lessons:

Incorporate simple object lessons that lead children to personally uncover the deeper spiritual truths behind everyday items or activities.

Often, your theme will play off of this sense of discovery in children. That’s why so many publishers develop curriculum with themes related to exploration and adventure.

PROMPT REFLECTION

Encourage intentional pauses to reflect, discuss, and internalize lessons learned.

Reflection Stations:

Set up quiet areas where children can draw, write, or talk about their personal experiences related to the day's lesson.

Guided Discussions:

After each activity, lead short conversations, asking children what they learned, felt, or discovered, reinforcing insights, and helping them articulate their thoughts.

Daily Journals:

Provide simple journals or reflection cards where kids can record their thoughts, questions, or prayers inspired by the lessons.

Some kids will naturally lean toward reflection. Of course, you want to lean into that. But even kids that are wired differently will grow when you encourage reflection. Reflection is an important discipline for all of us as we grow in our understanding of who God is and what the Bible teaches.

ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY

Cultivate an environment where questioning, exploring, and even wondering about faith are not only allowed but enthusiastically supported.

Ask Big Questions:

Intentionally pose open-ended, thought-provoking questions encouraging kids to explore and wonder about biblical truths.

Wonder Walls:

Create a designated area where kids can anonymously post questions or thoughts they have about faith, life, or God, fostering an open dialogue.

Curiosity Corner:

Design interactive exhibits or stations with intriguing items or questions related to your themes, sparking children's natural curiosity and prompting further discussion.

These three elements are particularly effective in children's ministry because kids naturally learn through exploring, asking questions, and reflecting on their experiences. Facilitating discovery and insight helps lessons become personal, meaningful, and unforgettable, laying a strong foundation for their spiritual journey.

Pride – Creating Moments of Achievement and Affirmation

Moments of pride happen when children experience genuine accomplishment—they've done something meaningful or reached an important milestone. These moments are deeply affirming and memorable, fueling confidence and spiritual growth. Think about how children beam when they've successfully memorized a verse or led a prayer for the first time. Those moments stick with them, shaping their identities as learners and followers of Jesus.

Your VBS can intentionally cultivate these impactful moments of pride. To do this effectively, consider these three strategic approaches:

RECOGNIZE GROWTH

Acknowledging children's personal progress fosters a sense of pride that motivates continued spiritual growth.

Milestone Celebrations:

Hold special recognition times when kids achieve significant milestones, such as memorizing key Bible verses or completing challenges, and provide certificates or simple rewards.

Growth Spotlights:

Set aside moments each day to highlight individual or group accomplishments, making children's progress visible and celebrated by the whole group.

Encouragement Wall:

Create an area where children and leaders post notes celebrating specific achievements, reinforcing each child's sense of personal growth and value.

You'll need to be proactive about noticing and recognizing growth, especially for the children you see regularly. Be creative in how you recognize growth and look for opportunities to praise growth wherever you see it.

CELEBRATE STRENGTHS

Highlighting and affirming individual strengths helps children feel uniquely seen and valued, building their self-confidence and helping them understand themselves better.

Talent Showcase:

Provide opportunities for children to share unique talents, such as music, storytelling, or art, affirming the diverse gifts God has given them. This could be a great addition to a church's "parent night," often the final evening of VBS.

Strength-Based Teams:

Assign children to tasks or activities that match their natural abilities, reinforcing that their gifts are valuable and purposeful in God's kingdom.

Personal Affirmations:

Intentionally offer individual affirmations throughout VBS, focusing on character qualities like kindness, leadership, or perseverance, reinforcing positive spiritual traits.

One creative way to do this is to assign a volunteer (or more, depending on the size of your church) to produce hand-written affirmation cards for participants.

Many kids grow up with little understanding of how God made them unique (see Psalm 139!)—with strengths that he will use to impact their world. You have a unique opportunity to see innate strengths and gifts that you can help them use throughout the rest of the year.

By the way, let parents know of the strengths you see in their children. Not only does that encourage them, but it may also help them encourage their children to build on those strengths.

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL RESPONSIBILITY

Giving children responsibilities that matter conveys trust and significance, instilling a powerful sense of pride and ownership in their VBS experience.

Student Leaders:

Assign children specific leadership roles, such as helping younger kids, leading prayers, or assisting volunteers, empowering them through meaningful responsibility.

Community Projects:

Engage children in service projects or tasks that impact the broader community or church, helping them see the tangible difference they're making.

Responsibility Badges:

Award badges or tokens to acknowledge responsibilities successfully carried out, visibly recognizing children's meaningful contributions.

By intentionally creating moments of pride, your VBS helps children build confidence, affirm their identity in Christ, and experience the joy of meaningful accomplishment, reinforcing lifelong spiritual lessons.

Connection – Creating Moments of Deep Relationships & Belonging

Moments of connection are those powerful experiences where kids feel deeply known, welcomed, and part of the church community. We live in a world where digital devices often hinder human connection, and children can be particularly in danger of this. That's why these moments when children begin to see themselves as a part of a group—a family ideally—are particularly memorable. Of the four elements described in this guide, this may have the most long-term impact on the discipleship of the children participating in VBS.

These deep moments of relationship can develop between children and between children and leaders.

FOSTER BELONGING

Every child longs to belong—to be accepted, valued, and seen. Fostering belonging at VBS means creating intentional environments and experiences where children feel immediately welcomed and personally important.

Consistent Small Groups:

Assign children to consistent small groups throughout the week, allowing them to build deeper friendships with peers and meaningful relationships with leaders.

Personal Greetings and Affirmation:

Train your volunteers to greet each child warmly by name and acknowledge them individually. This simple act establishes a sense of belonging from the start.

Inclusive Activities:

Plan games and activities that encourage collaboration rather than competition alone. Team-building exercises, group art projects, and cooperative games help kids build meaningful bonds.

Belonging is foundational to spiritual growth—especially for children. When kids feel they belong at your VBS, they're more open to learning, growing, and engaging with the lessons taught. Be on the lookout for children who might not be building relationships during the week. Make it a point to ensure that no child leaves without a friend.

CULTIVATE SHARED EXPERIENCES

Shared experiences build strong connections. When children experience something together—especially something unique or challenging—they naturally form deeper bonds with each other and with their leaders.

Group Challenges:

Create daily challenges or puzzles requiring teamwork and communication. Overcoming these together strengthens relationships and creates shared memories.

Daily Traditions:

Establish consistent traditions like a special handshake, group cheer, or opening ceremony that help children feel part of a united group, building anticipation and connection day by day.

Service Projects:

Engage children in simple service projects benefiting the local community. Working together toward a common purpose builds bonds and reinforces the importance of serving others.

By intentionally creating shared experiences, you're helping kids form bonds with each other and with your church. These experiences become reference points—memories that anchor their sense of belonging and remind them they're part of something meaningful, valuable, and bigger than themselves.

STRENGTHEN PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Connection thrives in small, personal interactions. Moments of one-on-one attention can significantly deepen children's relationships with leaders and peers, helping them feel truly cared for and understood.

Buddy Systems:

Assign kids to buddy pairs throughout VBS. This allows deeper, more personal conversations and helps shy or new kids integrate comfortably.

Leader Engagement:

Equip volunteers to intentionally interact with children during activities—not just supervising, but genuinely listening, encouraging, and affirming each child's strengths and experiences. Of course, you'll need extra volunteers to do this, but it will be a significant investment from the adults in your congregation to the children of your community.

Memory-Making Moments:

Provide opportunities for kids to create keepsakes or group projects (like a mural, group journal, or friendship bracelets) that they'll cherish as reminders of their time and friendships built at VBS.

Connection moments are what make kids feel part of something bigger. When children experience genuine belonging, share meaningful moments, and form lasting relationships, they create fertile ground for spiritual growth. By intentionally cultivating connection throughout your VBS, you're not just creating memories—you're building a spiritual community that can support children long after the week ends.

By intentionally fostering belonging, cultivating shared experiences, and strengthening personal connections, you help children experience deep relationships during VBS. These connections create positive emotional and spiritual associations, encouraging kids to continue their engagement with faith and community long after VBS has ended.

Practical Planning for Implementing Defining Moments

You've learned about the four powerful elements—Elevation, Insight, Pride, and Connection—that shape memorable moments in your VBS. However, understanding these elements and putting them into practice are two different challenges. How can you apply these concepts without overwhelming your volunteers or stretching your resources too thin?

In this chapter, you'll find practical ways to implement defining moments thoughtfully and effectively.



CHOOSING HIGH-IMPACT MOMENTS

Not every moment can—or should—be a big, memorable event. Your goal is to strategically select key moments that align with your objectives and strengths.

Prioritize Strategically:

Identify one or two key defining moments per day (such as opening celebrations, impactful storytelling, or a closing ceremony) that can make the biggest difference.

Align Moments with Goals:

Decide what you most want kids to experience each day (joy, insight, pride, or connection) and design moments specifically around those goals.

Involve Your Volunteers:

Seek input from your team about which types of moments they're most excited about or feel confident executing.

By intentionally selecting and prioritizing a few high-impact moments, you ensure clarity, excellence, and memorable experiences without overloading your program.

BALANCING STRUCTURE AND FLEXIBILITY

Great planning leaves room for spontaneity. A balanced VBS program has enough structure to feel organized and reliable yet enough flexibility to allow spontaneous, impactful moments.

Scheduled Spontaneity:

Plan regular opportunities for spontaneous fun, like surprise announcements or unplanned celebrations, giving your team space for creativity.

Clear but Flexible Schedule:

Provide volunteers with a clear framework for each day while empowering them to adapt activities as needed.

“Moment Opportunities”:

Identify segments in your schedule where spontaneous moments—like a leader's encouraging comment, prayer, or unexpected act of kindness—can naturally occur.

Balance structure with freedom. An adaptable approach allows your team to naturally seize spontaneous opportunities to deepen the emotional and spiritual impact.

Flexibility is essential, but structure provides security. Balancing the two allows you to leverage spontaneous and planned moments, maximizing both impact and manageability.

EQUIPPING YOUR TEAM

Volunteers create and nurture defining moments. Investing in them through training, encouragement, and resources is crucial to making your VBS memorable and spiritually impactful.

Focused Training:

Teach volunteers about the four elements of memorable moments so they can recognize and enhance those experiences naturally.

“Moment Coaching”:

Give volunteers simple prompts or questions to ask kids during activities to spark insightful conversations or encourage deeper connections.

Quick Reference Cards:

Provide volunteers with simple reference cards listing practical ways to elevate, facilitate insight, build pride, or foster connection.

Equipping your volunteers ensures they're not just supervising activities but actively engaging in creating meaningful moments with the children.

SIMPLE IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Great moments don't require complicated plans or expensive resources. Simple tools and templates can guide your planning process and keep everyone aligned and focused.

Moments Planning Checklist:

A clear checklist of key tasks and timing for each defining moment.

Moment Map Calendar:

A visual tool that helps you intentionally space out and balance Elevation, Insight, Pride, and Connection moments throughout the VBS schedule.

Volunteer Planning Template:

Easy-to-follow forms or checklists volunteers can use to identify and plan for creating defining moments.

Simple tools reduce complexity, empower your team, and keep your focus on what matters most—creating impactful, spiritually meaningful experiences for children.



BALANCING STRUCTURE AND FLEXIBILITY

Effective VBS planning finds the sweet spot between carefully structured activities and room for spontaneous experiences.

Scheduled Flex-Time:

Include short blocks within your daily schedule that allow leaders to connect personally with kids, offer spontaneous encouragement, or pause for unplanned teachable moments.

Volunteer Autonomy:

Clearly communicate to your volunteers where they can improvise and where consistency matters.

Back-Up Plans:

Create simple contingency plans to adapt if activities run long, finish early, or unexpected situations arise.

By balancing structure with flexibility, you set your team up for success in creating authentic, memorable experiences without stress or confusion.

Implementing the four elements of memorable moments doesn't need to be overwhelming. By prioritizing strategically, empowering your volunteers, balancing structured plans with flexibility, and using practical tools, your VBS can create defining moments that deeply impact children. Remember, the goal isn't to do everything—but to intentionally choose a few experiences that kids will remember for years.

Your Moments Matter

As you prepare for your Vacation Bible School, remember that creating memorable moments doesn't just make your event enjoyable—it creates lasting spiritual impressions that shape a child's understanding of God, faith, and community. Moments like these lay the foundations of faith that can last a lifetime.

As you move forward:

Keep your goals clear.

Equip and empower your volunteers.

Balance structure with flexibility.

Above all, trust that God is at work in each moment. Your thoughtful planning is meaningful stewardship—partnering with God to build a legacy of faith.

Ready to create impactful moments for your VBS? [ACS Technologies](#) can help you organize, simplify, and maximize your efforts with tech tools designed specifically for churches like yours. Visit acstechnologies.com to learn more.

