

VBS PRETEEN – THE EXTREME EXPERIENCE

Ideas for Preteen/Teen age group VBS – using the group.com/Shipwrecked materials. This is not intended to replace the materials but is a collection of ideas on how our church took things up a notch.

OVERVIEW

Our church is flourishing and we are excited about what God is accomplishing through the various ministries. Many of the ministries are focused on youth and young families, including the highlight of the year – VBS. Here are some of the things we do to focus on preteens/teens during VBS:

- Separate the preteens into their own group for VBS – they learn at a different level and engage at a different level. Purchase the “Rescue Reef Youth Leader Manual” from Group.
- Use teens as helpers and counselors for the preteens. This helps inspire the younger generation and engages the teens in the same life lessons.
- Make the preteen/teen space cool and exciting.
- Attempt to include at least two extreme activities each day (or evening if you run VBS after work hours like we do) that kids are going to go home and talk about.
- Extend the depth of learning for the older group and lead them to deeper understanding and engaged conversation. Expect more from them in a positive way.
- Attempt to make all activities and games meaningful with some type of lesson attached. Even if it is a small lesson.

WARNING: Taking VBS to the EXTREME does not mean making it highly entertaining for the sake of “fun”. The primary goal is to ENGAGE the students and take the learning and experience to a deeper level.

There is NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN TO:

- Pray for the kids every day and for the week preceding VBS. This is God’s ministry and you are simply aligning with His plan and serving His mission. Ask for God to bless the students and to guide you to say and lead according to what He wants them to learn/understand.
- Pray over the students and with the students. Ask for God to show-up and to bless them.
- Teach the gospel – the good news of Jesus. Present the salvation message at multiple times in multiple ways.
- Teach from the Bible. That is the point of VBS. Focus on verses and passages that will truly transform their understanding of God and his incredible mercy and love. (But keep it simple and easy to comprehend – teach at their level)
- Be real – don’t “entertain” or come across like a kids program on TV. Be vulnerable, honest, and BE YOURSELF. God called you into the ministry because He wants to use you and all of your imperfections to teach His awesome perfect truth.

We are sharing these ideas for free. Please be encouraged to do things your way and adjust to make it work for your group. And send me a note with your own ideas, too! I’d love to hear what works well and brings things to a new level for your VBS.

God bless!

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This document is also available on my website: TedTyree.com/tt/vbs.ashx

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WORRY INDEX CARDS ***

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THE IDEA

We are always looking for ways to allow the Holy Spirit to lead the students to a deeper relationship with God. Day 2 was focused on worry, so we had the kids...

- write their biggest worries on an index card and put it in a bucket (next to the indoor camp fire).
- They were instructed not to put their name on the card (with a colored pencil) so that we could read some of them out loud before we prayed about their worries together.
- After a couple minutes they had placed their cards in the bucket and we read about 5 (pre selected while the remainder were being brought to the bucket)
- We thanked the kids for their honesty and trust (very meaningful cards) and then prayed together.
- I promised to pray for each of the index cards individually that night. (and did)

THE STORY

What we did not expect was the depth and transparency these kids showed in writing their worries. Two of them said they were worried about going to Hell and several were concerned about not going to Heaven. (we had not even talked about Heaven/Hell, so this was their own concern). A couple were concerned about dying. This was way beyond our expectation and I actually teared up reading the cards out loud. When we thanked the kids for their honesty and trust – we really mean it sincerely.

Also – VERY IMPORTANT – we adjusted the next day's plans to address the topic of going to Heaven and finding God's forgiveness for the things we've done wrong (see next section). We invited the Pastor of our church to come speak to the kids briefly and pray a blessing over them. This was by far the most meaningful event during our week of VBS.

SALVATION MESSAGE AND TESTIMONY

OVERVIEW

As was mentioned above, the week took a twist of its own when the students indicated that their biggest worries were about Heaven and Hell and dying. So in addition to the lesson about the Cross on Thursday, we also added a message about God's forgiveness and "who goes to Heaven" on Wednesday.

THE BIBLE STORY

- Had kids read the story of the two men that went up to the temple to pray. Luke 18:10-14
- Had them find the "hidden treasure" in the passage... why the second man was forgiven and the second was not. (had them underline using colored pencils the words showing that the one man "exalted himself" and the words showing that the other man was being humble.)
- Also had them create a picture from paper cut-outs of cartoon characters to illustrate the story
- Returned as a group and had each group share their picture.

THE SALVATION MESSAGE

- Asked students how good you had to be to get into Heaven
- Taped a line down the middle of the room and had students get on one side or the other to indicate if they thought they were "good enough". (some kids were not sure and stood in the middle)
- Read Romans 3:10 that no one is righteous
- Made all the students move to the "not good enough" side of the room. Had leaders – and even me – go to the "not good enough" side of the room.
- Asked – so does that mean NO ONE IS GOING TO HEAVEN?
- Discussed needing to be FORGIVEN by God to go to Heaven. Asked students if they could think of an example from the Bible treasure hunt on how we can be forgiven.
- Invited students to pray along with leader to ask for God's forgiveness.

PASTOR'S TESTIMONY

Because this was such a heavy topic, especially the worries about Heaven and Hell, we felt it was a good idea to invite the Pastor to come speak briefly to the preteens. By God's amazing providence, our Pastor had the same worries when he was their age and that led him to accept Christ into his life at a activity for pre-teens/teens. He closed by having the students place their hands on each other's heads (leaders too) and praying a blessing over the entire group. (Having physical/visual experiences like this help solidify the deeper spiritual lesson.)

NOTE: This unplanned detour in our VBS was by far the most meaningful part of our week. It lead to a deeper meaning on Thursday when we did the Cross activity. Be open to leading of the Holy Spirit. It is likely He will lead your VBS in a different direction that is meaningful for your specific group.

One last thing that we did at the end of Thursday was to ask the students to be a little bit bold:

- Stand if you put your trust in Jesus for the first time this week (stay standing)
- Stand if you recommitted your heart and life to Christ this week. (stay standing)
- Stand if you accepted Christ in the past.

At this point all 30+ students were standing (and leaders too). This floored me (and humbled me) knowing that it is an age where making a bold statement like this is difficult for students. We then said “look around you – this is your family”. We pulled the group close and prayed together.

TREASURE HUNT BIBLE STUDIES – WITH A TWIST ***

THE IDEA

In the past we had trouble getting this age group to actually read and respond to Bible passages. So we came up with an idea to make it a little more engaging.

- Placed the lesson plan in manila envelopes – included a copy of the Bible verse for each student and a leader’s guide for the questions they would ask and activities they would lead.
- Hid the packets together in the room
- When it came time for the small group lessons – we instructed the students that
 - a treasure was hidden on the island
 - they needed to find it (showed them what a packet looked like)
 - but when they found it, take it quietly and don’t let anyone else know where it is
 - Then sit as a group and “find” the treasure in the Bible story.
- Most Bible study lessons included finding something in the passage and underlining it.
- At the end of each lesson we gave the group an activity – usually with a technology twist (so we could display a picture/video clip on the TV... yes, our island had a TV for showing videos)
 - Take a still picture (Manikin challenge) of your group acting out a scene from the lesson. Text it to the technology leader (person running the computer/projector) Video clips work too.
 - Write down the “golden nugget” from the lesson and turn it in to the leader (or text it to the leader). The first team to send in the right answer wins a prize.
 - Create a picture (from cartoon cutouts that are pre-printed). Students cut and tape together a picture to illustrate part of the story. Can present the actual picture to the group or send a photo of the picture to the tech guy/gal.

THE CROSS & HANDWASHING – A STEP FURTHER

OVERVIEW

The Cross lesson starting on page 52 is fantastic. We decided to take it up a notch for 3 reasons:

- We wanted to deepen the activity and add some fun.
- We wanted to emphasize the Heaven vs. Hell topic because of the student's expressed worries regarding this topic
- Because we had already presented the gospel message, we wanted to reiterate that message, but also address the need to go to Jesus daily for cleansing/forgiveness (the concept of "sanctification" without using that term)

ACTIVITY ADJUSTMENTS

- Spoke to pre-teens in advance about the two thieves and why one was forgiven and one was not. This was to make the process of laying the cloth on the cross more meaningful.
- We gave the students white cloth strips instead of black. This was more illustrative of the contrast of "sin" as they messed up their strip.
- We provided markers, mud, watered down ketchup, and a green pickled mustard (did not tell them what it was). This made the activity more messy... and more fun. NOTE: Put a water proof tarp down on the floor before doing this activity!
- As the preteens were "messing up" their cloth, we had them (and leaders) think of sins in our lives. Leader can also be adding mud and mess to their own cloth while speaking. This made it more clear what types of things in our lives are considered "sin".
- Suggested as the students lay the cloth on the cross that they say something like "God, please forgive me a sinner" (relating back to the message from the story in Luke)
- We did not let the kids wash their hands after this activity (see below)
- Had the kids assemble back around in-door campfire area – they were both concerned and bubbling with excitement that they were not supposed to wash their hands. Esp. those that went overboard and had very messy hands.
- Talked about forgiveness of sin – being "saved" or "cleansed" from our sin – discussed how this applies to our entire life past/present/future. However, we still can go back to Jesus daily. "Our hands still get dirty from day-to-day". Spending time with Jesus and reading the Bible can renew our faith and keep us close to God.
- While addressing the students, had someone replace the dirty strips of cloth with fresh clean white strips of cloth. The students did not see this happen. This was to represent the cleansing of our sin by Jesus.

The lesson continued (below) with a handwashing ceremony...

HAND WASHING

We separated the hand washing from the cross lesson to symbolize the need for daily time with Jesus. This is a lot like a foot washing ceremony, but less uncomfortable for preteens. After discussing the above items...

- Related the need to wash hands with the story of Jesus performing the washing of the Disciples' feet.
- We took the students back to the 3 crosses but had bowls/pitchers of the warm scented water lined up. We setup 5 lines to handle 35 students.
- We had a counselor at each bowl
- The counselor asked the student if they had put their trust in Jesus – if not, asked if they would like to.
- Yes or no to the above question, the counselor would still:
 - Pray a blessing over the student
 - Wash their hands

NOTE: It was not a good idea to give them the markers and mud/ketchup at the same time. Had to clean the markers individually. Maybe giving them these items in phases would have been a bit better.

NOTE: We set a script out for each counselor since they were not all comfortable coming up with their own words to say.

Adding the additional items to the lesson made it a little less “somber” in nature, but probably more memorable and perhaps more of a teaching moment. Sometimes that is a good trade-off with a preteen crowd.

Some of the students wanted to “keep” their white cloth strip. We did not let them, but on Friday we gave them markers and allowed them to decorate a new white strip of cloth. We suggested writing a Bible verse (gave them a few to choose from) and other sayings to remind them of what they learned at VBS.

GIANT JENGA

OVERVIEW

Each day Tues-Friday we wanted to review what the students had learned from the day before, drill it in, but not become monotonous or boring. It just so happens before VBS week my sister discovered how to make a giant Jenga game out of 2x3 blocks of wood.

THE GAME PLAN

Here was our approach:

- Had Giant Jenga setup prior to the start of the event
- Had a list of questions prior to the event asking questions about the day before. Questions were random and of three types:
 - Serious – to reiterate a point from the day before. Eg. What did Mary choose to do that Martha did not. (Answer: Listen to Jesus/Learn from Jesus)
 - Factual – eg. How many thieves died on the cross next to Jesus? (followed by “How many of them went to Heaven?”)
 - Fun – eg. What could the leaf blower represent in the sheep race game?
- Had a counselor stand next to the Jenga game to help the students with the process of taking a block from the stack and moving it to the top. (and keep those waiting in line for their turn from pushing in too close)
- Each evening used a different method of questioning:
 - First evening had counselors in the audience with fake microphones walk around and pick someone to answer “next question”
 - Another evening had kids line up who wanted to answer a question – allowed them to ask a friend in the audience if they did not know the answer.
 - Traditional “raise your hand if you know the answer”
- Each student that got a correct answer gets in line to take a turn moving a block in the Jenga set to the top.
- Played the game until it fell. Then it was game-over. (goals was to keep it short and fun)



NOTE: Some kids wanted to get a laugh and knocked it down on purpose. By the last night we had to ask kids who were going to knock down the tower to please let others play first.

NOTE: Kids loved the game and it became a side activity later in the week when we did various games that not everyone wanted to play.

OVERVIEW

To take the “food defense” to another level we did three things:

- Added a twist to the challenge
- Added a “hidden lesson” to the game
- Tied it to a food service project

THE TWIST

Based on a thought provoking game called “frenzy”, we gave the following rules:

- Create 2 to 5 teams
- Each team gets a hoola-hoop. Also put a hoola-hoop in the middle of the field with the food basket. Tell each team that the hoola-hoop is their ‘basket’
- Spread the food around the field (in addition to some being in the center basket)
- Have each team select a captain. The captain CANNOT DO ANYTHING except direct the other team members. The team members CAN ONLY DO WHAT THE CAPTAIN TELLS THEM. For example, if the captain say “go get that box of spaghetti”, then that is the only thing that team member can try to do (until given the next instruction by the CAPTAIN).
- Explain that the goal is to “get all the food in the common group basket without cheating”

HIDDEN PLOT: Once a team “thinks” they have won because they stole all the food... the referee states “NO – Nobody has won the game yet”. If asked, then repeat the above goal. The TRUE goal is to have all the teams work together to put the food in the center hoola-hoop. But they have to figure that out on their own.

LESSON LEARNED (it is better if the students can figure this out on their own)

- What did it feel like to have all your food taken away?
- Was there enough food for everyone? Why didn’t we think to share it?
- Did God create enough food in this world to feed everyone?
- Why do some people go hungry? (emphasize our responsibility to care for others – to be God’s hands and feet)

TAKING IT FURTHER

We ran this activity the first day and discussed how important it is to God that we care for people who are in need. In addition to the group fundraiser with the younger kids, we challenged the older students to also collect food for the local food pantry.

- Share a little from John 6:1-14 where Jesus used a small amount of food to feed many
- James 1:27 God wants us to care for orphans and widows – those who cannot provide for their own needs
- The food from the game can be added to the donation pile (unless it got crushed – which does happen – we ended up with a pretzel disaster zone which the kids thought was the greatest)
- Goal is not “lots of food” (although that would be great) Goal is 100% participation – even if you only bring in one box of spaghetti. (counselors and teachers should also participate)
- Send a slip home with kids as a reminder to bring in donations
- Had the VBS group pray a blessing over the food and the families that would receive it.

- Last day of VBS had a couple kids/adults volunteer to help take the food over to a local food pantry. Reported the results to the rest of the group.

SHEEP RACING EXTREME Page 17

The basis of the sheep race was for each student to blow 3 cotton balls from a starting point to the “goal”. But I must say, there is nothing that makes a cotton ball sheep race more exciting than a LEAF BLOWER!

- We called the goal “The Eternal Ring of Truth” just for fun and to emphasize the point.
- We told the students that they were to represent “God” and the sheep represent Us.
- We had one practice run to get kids focused on the goal.
- We then had the real race, at which point one of the counselors came out carrying a leaf blower! Mayhem ensued. But we did still end up with a winner of the race.

EATING BUGS, LARVA, AND SEAWEED SMOOTHIES

Although most of our activities have a lesson or “point” involved... on occasion we can help but do some activities just to have fun. We decided that because we are stranded on an island, we would have to make our snack from whatever we could find. On our island we could only seem to find crickets, larva, and seaweed. (The crickets and larva were real.)

Eating Bugs/Larva:

- Ordered edible baked crickets online – flavored such as cheddar cheese and BBQ
- Ordered edible baked larva online – flavored such as BBQ and Mexican Spice
- We started this as more of a contest to have 4 kids eat 3 crickets - but within minutes all the kids were crowding around to try them.
- We then had the contestants each pick someone for the next ‘round’. When the new contestants came up to the front, we let them know we were going to “increase the challenge” and brought out the larva (looks like large meal worms).
- Again kids crowded around to try them.

This was a big hit!

NOTE: Be aware of kids with food allergies.

Seaweed Smoothies:

On another evening we used “Seaweed Smoothies” to teach about the Psalm “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

- Prep: filled a blender with Blue and Green fruit juice: Naked Blue Machine and Naked Green Machine (both of which look pretty gross, like thick blended vitamin shake, but tastes great)
- Prep: Boiled a little spinach until it looked like seaweed.
- Prep: Mashed up some watermelon and added food coloring to make it look somewhat purple and gross.
- Prep: Placed all of these items in front of the student area before they came in.
- Shared Psalm 34:8 (it was actually a message in a bottle on day 3)

- Told students that I wanted to make them something special, so I found some seaweed and some island goop of unknown origin.
- Put a scoop of goop and the spinach (looked like seaweed) into the blender and blended it for a while.
- Acted as though it smelled funky. Asked for volunteers to try it. “Taste and see that the smoothie is good!”
- When the first volunteer came up, whispered in their ear loudly so others could hear me “Pretend it tastes good”.
- After they tried it and said “It *IS* good”... had them select another person to “try” it. Again whispered loudly “pretend it tastes good”.
- Repeated for a while. Soon everyone wanted to try it and kids were lining up to get a small cup to taste. NOTE: Had a backup pitcher of same juice mixture that was pulled out when the blender mixture ran out.
- Took some time to talk to the kids about how often people avoid God and Christianity because they think it is going to be boring or think that they have to throw out their ability to reason. But for those that take the time to get to know God and the Bible, they find out that life with Jesus DOES taste good!

NOTE: Be aware of food allergies. We discovered (by God’s grace) that one of our students had an allergy to blue food dye and blue berries. We had to ask her in advance not to taste the seaweed smoothie.

WHAT TO DO WHEN IT RAINS

For our VBS this year, we had rain storms 4 out of the 5 days. But it still was a fantastic week. Many games and activities in the guide can be easily adjusted for indoor fun. Here are a couple ideas...

- **Indoor slip-n-slide:** We had planned for a slip-n-slide the last day of VBS. We like making the last day a “celebration” because life in Christ is something to celebrate! Since it had rained most days, we let the parents know in advance that we were going outside rain-or-shine. Unfortunately the rain on the last day was accompanied by lightning and strong winds, so we were confined to indoors activities. But that did stop us from celebrating. We setup an indoor slip-n-slide by placing a large piece of mylar (from Lowes) over a thin runway of mats. Around the edges we placed towels to absorb excess water. We used spray bottles and baby shampoo to make the plastic slippery and had a blast!
- **Indoor Lacrosse:** Page 49 - The VBS Guide for Teens explains how to play Lacrosse outdoors. We almost had to play this game indoors. To adjust the game we were planning on requiring that the kids remain sitting on the floor. They would start with their team spread out across the playing area. They could move around until they had a ball in their container and would then have to stay put and pass the ball to someone else. The goal would be to learn to work as a team and to pass the ball from one player to another.

NOTE: we played with a large bag of balls from a ball-pit rather than tennis balls. This kept the game a little less aggressive (lighter ball) and also allowed us to introduce more than one ball at a time.

NOTE: even when playing outside we required the student to stop moving around as soon as

they had a ball in their container. Again, forcing them to work as a team rather than just running around the field on their own.

LESSON: We added a “lesson” to this game. At the end we rewarded two players who showed the best sportsmanship and helping others. (not the team with the most points) Then we talked about how in life we think the goal is to get the most money and fame, but the true winners are the ones who are rewarded by God. 2 Chronicles 16:9

FUN ACTIVITIES

- **Dunk hats** – we were able to order 3 dunk hats online prior VBS. These were a quick fun activity. Can be done indoor or outdoors. This can be repeated later while other ‘fun’ activities are going on for kids that did not get a chance to try it during the main event.
- **Bite-the-bag** – as described in the VBS Teen Guide is a lot of fun. It is particularly fun because kids that are normally not as good at other sports-like-games tend to be especially good at this game. This is another game that can be repeated as a fun activity for those that did not get to participate during the group activity.



CRAFT IDEAS

Kids love making crafts – even preteens. But it also can take a lot of time to make a meaningful craft. It does not add a lot to the ‘lesson’ part of VBS, but does give the students something to remind them of VBS and hopefully what they learned.

So this year we kept the preteen crafts simple. Here were our craft ideas:

- **Message in a bottle** – ordered 40 plastic bottles with a cork. Students wrote themselves a letter to read in 10 years. We gave them a letter template as a suggestion, but they could write their own. They also could put small shells in the bottle and tie a ribbon around the neck of the bottle.
NOTE: Make sure they write their name on the outside of the bottle.
NOTE: Once the message is inserted, it is very difficult to get out of the bottle.
- **Decorated Shells:** Simple idea to give the kids shells. They used magic markers to write a verse or short phrase like “I put my trust in Jesus”. Gave them a list of verses and ideas to choose from.
- **White Strips of Cloth:** This idea came to us when one of the students wanted to keep their sin covered white cloth strip during the cross activity on Thursday. On Friday we gave kids an option to decorate a white cloth strip with a Bible verse or saying (same list as with the shells). They could keep this white cloth as a reminder of VBS 2018.

AMBIANCE

Our goal is to make a space that is fun for the preteens, but with a little older appeal than the rest of VBS. Again, we are trying to make everything inviting and exciting, but without making it a “show”. Kids are used to entertainment and it is almost always set in an unrealistic or ‘fantasy’ type scenario. Here

we want to keep the fun element, but we need it to be real and authentic. We also want the space to be “safe” so student feel they can be open and honest.

ROOM

- Used the teen room in our church to be the preteen VBS space. (Previous years we used the café or a staff house space.)
- Created a campfire like area with a fake fire (light with cloth flame and a fan)
- Surrounded the camp fire with a tan drop-cloth to be the “sand”

CLOTHING

- Counselors all wore purple t-shirts (that was the color of the preteen group)
- Leader wore torn outer shirt and ripped pants – just for fun - not scruffy/dirty
- Some days wore a funny hat or fake beard – worn during beginning/ending ceremony. Kids love borrowing the hats, beard, or anything like this. These items were removed prior to starting the preteen event.

Below are a few pics showing the preteen area that was setup for our week of VBS. This was setup in the teen center at our church.



