



Preparing Your Child for Baptism

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Dear Parent and Young Person,

I pray that one of the effects of this book will be that Jesus Christ is the satisfaction of your home—that he is treasured deeply, magnified fully, and sufficient in your child’s life. Because Jesus is the object of baptism, any discussion of the topic must be Jesus-saturated. Baptism, from beginning to end, is about Jesus. When we come to the waters of baptism we are reminded of Jesus’ saving work on the cross and God’s eternal plan for redemption.

As a pastor, there are few things that bring me greater joy than to see an individual, especially a young person, follow Jesus into the waters of baptism. It is a joyous occasion because the individual being baptized is publically proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of their life; and they want everyone to know it! Baptism is a public profession of an existing faith in Jesus Christ. The candidate for baptism is identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection and putting a stake in the ground that they will stand with Christ. Jesus commanded his followers to baptize others; therefore, baptism is an act of obedience on our behalf.

You are likely reading this book because your child wants to be baptized or you desire baptism for your child. This desire is noble and recognizes the biblical teaching that baptism is an important step of faith in a believer’s life. It should not be entered into lightly or without proper preparation. Both parent and child must understand what baptism is, why a person is to be baptized, and when it is appropriate to be baptized.

This resource was created to help *you* prepare your child for baptism. Too often, the church shares this experience with a young person and does not include the parent in any significant way. This robs the parent of an opportunity to nurture their child’s faith and minimizes a child’s ability to journey together with their parent during an important milestone of life. It is my desire to see parents taking an active role in the preparation and celebration of their child’s baptism.

May this experience be one that is remembered with fondness and a point of growth in your child’s spiritual life.



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This resource was created so that parent and child can share the baptism experience together. Parents, we want to help you succeed in nurturing your child's faith. Young person, we want to encourage a strong bond between you and your parent and for you to take your spiritual cues from them.

I envision the parent(s) and the candidate for baptism sitting in the living room, a coffee shop, or around the kitchen table with Bibles open and lively discussion occurring. This resource is concise enough to be completed in multiple sections or it may be helpful to get away for a short time and work through the material in a special day with your child. Choose whatever is most helpful for your family; just don't race through the material.

- The first step is to determine if your child is a Christian and can articulate the Gospel message. A good percentage of young people begin the baptism process but need additional time to either understand the Gospel or to mature as a believer. Your job as a parent is to gauge whether or not your child is ready to be baptized. Once you have completed this book, parent and child will meet with a pastor to confirm your decision and begin the baptism process.
- The second step is to understand the details of baptism—the why, the what, the how, the who, and the when? During this section, there will be a number of Bible passages to read and discuss. Your goal as a parent is to help your child understand the meaning of these passages while also providing the opportunity to let your child share his or her thoughts and feelings about baptism. The parent is the facilitator guiding the discussion while the young person is actively engaged in readings and in response to questions. This should be an enjoyable time. Go somewhere special, get something yummy to eat or drink, and enjoy studying the Bible together.

- The third step is for the young person to write his or her testimony and for the parent to plan a baptism celebration. You may want to wait for the completion of this final step until a pastor meets with you and is able to discern the genuineness of the young person's faith and readiness for baptism. There are three options in presenting your testimony during the baptism.
 - * Answer the Pastor's questions during the baptism.
 - * Live testimony, with maximum of five sentences.
 - * Video recording, recoded prior to the baptism.

To get the most out of this experience, parents should prepare before sitting down with the child and should be comfortable enough with the material so there is no need to read directly from the book. This book is a tool to help you prepare, not a straightjacket that you have to stick to word-for-word. Make it your own, and work hard to make the time interactive and engaging. If further study is desired, I highly recommend *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* edited by Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright; *Your Child's Profession of Faith* by Dennis Gundersen; and Paul Jewett's classic work, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*.

Parent and child should work through this material together in-person instead of each reading the material separately and then coming together for a short discussion. This will communicate to the child that this is important and something worthy of your time and energy. Make prayer a vital aspect of this process. Prayer reveals your dependence upon God and invites his presence in your midst to expose motives and the condition of the candidate's heart.

The Baptism Process

1. *Be an example worthy of imitation.* You cannot lead your child somewhere you have not been. The parent that encourages a child to be baptized should be baptized, or in the process of being baptized, themselves. Furthermore, you cannot expect to give spiritual instruction to your child if you are walking in disobedience and deliberately sinning against the Lord.¹ Work diligently to seek the Lord and his ways. Like the apostle Paul, you are then able to say to your child, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). This task does not require that you are a perfect Christian or that you are the most knowledgeable person regarding the content of Scripture. It does require that your heart beats for Jesus and that you are willing to lean of God's grace to guide you through the process. It is vital that you prepare your heart for this task and that you are right with God and your child before beginning.
2. *Contact Grace church.* Although this book was created to include parents in the process of a child's baptism, it is still vital that the church be involved. Baptism is an ordinance given to the church, not the family. Therefore, it is important that a pastor walks with you through this process and that the baptism occurs with believers who are part of the local church the child attends. The spiritual leadership of the church, pastors and elders, are given the responsibility to oversee baptism and the Lord's Supper so it is not abused or entered into improperly. This book is not a replacement for what the church is doing, but an enhancement to it. It is important to seek your church's partnership in this effort. Once support has been provided you can move forward with the contents of the book.

3. *Thoroughly prepare.* While you may be able to “wing it” with some level of success, it is best if thought and planning go into this activity. Items that you can prepare: your heart, your meeting place, your content, and the expectations of your child.
4. *Parent and child meet together.* Parents are encouraged to have a minimum of three different sessions with the child to cover the content of this book. Parents are also encouraged to meet individually with each child for two reasons (1) This makes it possible for parents to assess each child individually and forces each child to speak for themselves without being influenced by the thoughts and actions of others, and (2) it removes the pressure to be baptized. This is particularly true if one sibling is being baptized and the other sibling is not ready.
5. *Pastor and family meet together.* Once you feel the child is ready to be baptized, a pastor will meet with you. The young person will be asked to share their testimony and the pastor will review his or her understanding of the Gospel and the meaning of baptism.
6. *Baptism.* If the pastor recommends the young person be baptized, go online at: <http://atgrace.com/baptismregistration>, complete and submit the registration form. You will then be contacted to schedule your baptism. The family will be able to choose between multiple options of different service times and different settings (depending on the time of year). It is encouraged that family and friends be invited to this special occasion.
7. *Celebration.* The celebration time has been very meaningful for both child and parent. It is an opportunity for the parent to spiritually invest in the child and for the child to be affirmed by the parent. The last section of this book will help you prepare for the celebration.

Step 1: Understand the Gospel

What your child needs most is Jesus Christ, not happiness, or health, or academic success. To gain the world and lose their soul would be a catastrophe of eternal significance. The parent's first priority must be to see that their child treasures Jesus and can say with increasing intensity, “As a deer pants for water, so my soul pants for you, O God,” (Psalm 42:1). Like Peter, our children must recognize Jesus as the Christ who is to be Lord of their lives (Mark 8:29). Like Paul, our children's desire should be “to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Philippians 1:23). Jesus is the all-satisfying gift that undeserving sinners can receive and enjoy. Does your child treasure Jesus? Is Jesus the priority and passion of your child's life?

Your goal is to make sure your child understands the Christian Gospel and displays a strong affection for Jesus. Baptism, void of a redeemed relationship with Jesus, is unbiblical and of no value. Therefore, your goal is to make sure your child understands the depravity of their soul and meaning of sin, the holiness of God, and the significance of Christ's work on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for those who believe in him, and the need to respond to Jesus by faith.

By asking your child questions, you will be able to better discern if he or she understands the Gospel. Be sure to allow your child to wrestle with the answers as there is the danger of answering for your child or providing too much assistance. If you find that your child does not understand the Gospel, take the opportunity to explain it to him and invite him to respond immediately, as this was Jesus' standard mode of operation (Mark 1:18).

Questions that you can ask your child include: ²

- Who is Jesus Christ? What made him unique or different from everyone else?
- Why did Jesus die? What did Jesus' death and resurrection accomplish?

- What is sin and what are the consequences for sin?
- Who is Jesus and why did he die on the cross?
- How does the death of Jesus accomplish our salvation?
What is the saving significance of the cross?
- What must a person do to be saved?
- Why is it good news that sins can be forgiven?

Answers should be based on what the Bible says, not on personal preference. Invite your child to open his Bible and together you can search the Scriptures for what God says. If your child answers that salvation is about going to heaven, avoiding the pain of hell, or not having a guilty conscience, he has missed the heart of the Gospel which is a strong affection for God himself.

There are many different methods of explaining the Gospel to others. The Romans road has been a helpful method for many (Romans 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; and 10:9). However you choose to explain the Gospel, there are a number of essential elements that your child will need to understand such as the problem and consequence of sin, the holiness of God, the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the responsibility to respond in faith.

1. **Man is sinful.** The Bible states that sin is missing the mark, a transgression against God, unrighteousness, lawlessness, depravity, and evil. Sin is living in opposition to God and his ways. It is distorted desire and perverse love for creation rather than the Creator. Sin is personal (we are all sinners) and a function of the will (we all willingly choose to sin). Genesis 3:1-7 depicts the entrance of sin into the world through Adam and Eve. The sin nature of the first humans became the sin nature of every human that followed, except for Jesus. No person is righteous or good (Romans 3:10-12). All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Sin enslaves, dictating the direction of our life. Lost in sin, we are spiritually blind and spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-3). The very identity of a sinner is defined by sin. For this reason Paul states that the old man must die and a new man must be born (Romans 6:6-8).

Those who sin will die and deserve the wrath of God (Romans 1:32 and Ephesians 2:3). Because of our sin, God will repay all for what they have done (Matthew 16:27) through eternal, unending punishment in hell (Matthew 22:13).

2. **God is holy.** Sin is most visible in contrast to the holiness of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. To be holy means to be set apart or unique. The Hebrew word for Holy means "marked off" or "withdrawn from common, ordinary use."³ In the Old Testament objects in the temple were called holy because they were set apart for worship of God. People are called holy because they are set apart or withdrawn to God alone.

Because God is completely separate and different from all creation he is the source of holiness. Exodus 15:11 affirms God's uniqueness, "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, doing wonders?" Isaiah 6:1-4 shows us a vision that the prophet had in which he had a glimpse of God's holiness. "Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. The foundations of the thresholds shook, and the house was filled with smoke. The seraphim cried out, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts.' When we say God is holy we are also saying that there is no evil or sin in him. He is pure and good. God has no part in sin, evil, or temptation (James 1:13). Habakkuk 1:13 says, 'Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.'"

Thus, we believe that God is perfect and his perfection is our standard in life. Truth and right flow from a perfect God. That is why Leviticus 11:44 says, "I am the Lord your God consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy." Peter also tells us to be holy as God is holy. Because God is holy, we must be holy. Sin and God cannot mix. God will not look the other way or excuse sin. Because he is just, he must deal with sin. But in God's great love for sinners he provided a way to enjoy perfect fellowship with him. How can this be accomplished?



3. **Jesus became our substitute.** God himself, in Jesus Christ, decided to suffer “the wages of sin” that his own holiness demands. He paid the penalty for our sin by shedding his own blood (Heb. 9:22). He took the punishment each of us deserves. The prophet Isaiah states that the Messiah would be “wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and would bear our punishment” (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus died in our place (John 15:13; Is. 53:12). Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming the curse for us (Gal. 3:13). On the cross God placed his full wrath on the Son. Paul says that Jesus “who knew no sin,” was “made... to be sin” so that “we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). God placed our sin on Christ so that he might place his righteousness on us! This is how an all-holy God dealt with sin. Jesus became an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10), took our penalty, and satisfied God’s holy requirement that no sin go unpunished.

4. **Salvation is had by faith in Jesus.** God forgives those who repent of sins. Our relationship with God and our eternal destiny depend on the cross and our response to Jesus. Faith is God’s work in us and the way we benefit from what Jesus did for us. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). The believer is incapable of faith without the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith is trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins. Faith believes in the words and promises of God (Titus 3:4-7). Faith is a response to God’s work in our heart. Faith includes knowledge about the total depravity of our soul and the person and work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. The key is that we must respond by faith otherwise we are still dead in our sin.

Paul describes the way to salvation like this, “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9).



The Gospel in a nutshell: We are saved from the wrath of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus for the glory of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Talk about it together

As a family work through this question and activity:

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-9 out loud. What does this passage tell us about salvation?
2. Role play: A neighborhood friend recognizes there is something different about you. He notices that you are joyful, don’t use profane words, and generally act different from others. He asks you, “Can you tell me how to become a Christian?” Explain to your “friend” the Gospel of Jesus.

Step 2: Affirmation of faith

It is important that your child affirm his or her love for Jesus and understand what is being asked at baptism. We want the child to be baptized because of a personal desire of his own. A parent is wise to prompt the child to follow and obey Christ, but ultimately the child must take ownership for his faith as one day he will stand before God and be judged based on individual choices (Rom. 14:10). Salvation in Christ is not a result of one’s parents or church, but our own personal faith in Jesus. Remind your child that they must embrace Christ as their Savior and that baptism verifies this truth.

For hundreds of years throughout church history candidates for baptism have been asked three questions. It is important that the young person understand why these questions are being asked and what they are affirming.



1. **Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?** The young person is stating that salvation is in Christ alone through faith alone. The young person is claiming to trust in Jesus for salvation.
2. **Do you renounce the devil and all his work?** The young person is claiming allegiance to Christ. They renounce all loyalty to Satan. The believer is making a commitment to hate evil and obey Christ. Sin no longer has any power over the Christian and the Christian states they are an enemy of Satan and his ways.
3. **Do you promise, God helping you, to serve him in the fellowship of his church for the rest of your life?** The young person is professing a desire to be active in the local church. The baptized believer is to worship weekly, serve regularly, give financially, and become a member of the church.

All three questions will be asked at one time. After which, the child may answer loudly, "I do."

Step 3: WHY is baptism important?

Baptism is often down-played as an optional choice for the Christian. It is frequently misunderstood and often administered poorly. Some believers view baptism as a minor addition to faith, yet the New Testament speaks of baptism as a major milestone that each and every believer in Jesus Christ is to experience. Your goal is to help your child understand why baptism is so important. If your child understands why baptism matters he or she will be much more interested in being baptized. Baptism is important for four reasons:



1. **Jesus was baptized and commands the church to baptize** (Matt 3:15-16; Matt. 28:18-20). That which is important to Jesus and commanded by him must be followed by his disciples. Baptism is indispensable for believers. Since baptism was ordained by Jesus it is properly understood as an ordinance, rather than a sacrament as it does not bring about any change in the person baptized.
2. **In Scripture, baptism is regularly connected with belief and salvation.** Baptism is important because it is tied to the Gospel and the saving work of Jesus on the cross. Baptism reveals a person's entire theological framework since it tells us much about how one views the Gospel. *Take a moment and write as many answers to this question as possible: What beliefs are you revealing when baptized?*
3. **Baptism indicates a new lifestyle and a commitment to follow Christ.** It is closely linked with the believer's death to sin and new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3). Baptism provides the opportunity for the believer to testify publically of God's saving work in their life and their desire to follow and obey Jesus. The work of God in salvation should lead to a believer's response in baptism.
4. **Baptism is public.** Christians are told by an unbelieving world that it is acceptable to believe what they want so long as they keep their faith to themselves. Satan loves undercover Christians who are timid with their faith and quietly keep it to themselves. One of the values of baptism is that it is an opportunity for the believer to publically proclaim Christ. God built in a means for every believer to state publically that they are followers of Jesus Christ. This public proclamation is not meant to be a one-time action, but a daily lifestyle. Thus the Christian is told to be salt, light, and not to be ashamed of the Gospel. *What is the value of a public proclamation of faith verses a private one?*



For Christians who lived at other periods in church history, baptism often meant persecution or martyrdom. The same is true today for Muslims who convert to Christianity. A public profession of faith through baptism is often the act that causes family and friends to ostracize or disown the new believer. For these individuals, baptism was no small matter. Those who are baptized are often tempted and under attack from Satan. Such was the case for Jesus. After his baptism, he went into the desert where Satan tempted him for forty days and nights. Your baptism is not an empty action or a minor matter. It is a monumental moment in every believer's life.

Baptism is meant to be public in nature with the purpose of providing the platform for the Christian to tell others what they believe about Jesus. You should invite as many family and friends as possible to your baptism and when baptized, expect to publically share in person or by video why you are being baptized and what you believe about Jesus.

Talk about it together

As a family, work through these questions and activities:

1. As a family, read Matthew 3:15-16 and Matthew 28:18-20. What do these verses teach us about baptism?
2. Why would a Christian want to be baptized?
3. Why do you want to be baptized?
4. With your child, create a list of family and friends to be invited to the baptism.



Step 4: WHAT is baptism?

It is critical that the candidate for baptism understands the meaning and significance of baptism. A young person should be able to explain what he is doing and why, without any prompting or support from a parent. A baptism, administered properly, should reveal beliefs, summarize faith, proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus, and incorporate the believer into the church.

Baptism was instituted by Christ and is to be administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁴ There is no saving power in baptism. It does not result in the remission of sins and is not a means of saving grace. It is a sign of already being cleansed from sin by faith alone in Christ alone (Romans 10:9). The power of baptism is not in water, it is in God himself. Baptism is for believers in Jesus Christ and signifies being adopted into the family of God and sanctified with the Holy Spirit. Baptism is an outward symbol of an already existing inward change.

Baptism is an:

1. **Identification:** Romans 6:1-5 explains the spiritual significance of the act of believer's baptism. It is an identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism is a summary of faith. It points us to the cross and the empty grave. When properly practiced it differentiates believers from non-believers. It is Christianity in visible form. It is faith on display. It is an outward expression of an inward reality.
 - a. **It symbolizes his death.** As Jesus went down into death, so we go down into the waters of baptism.
 - b. **It symbolizes his burial.** As Jesus was buried for three days, so we are buried for a moment in the watery grave.

c. **It symbolizes his resurrection.** As Jesus arose, so we arise to live in newness of life.

2. **Declaration:** Why aren't baptisms administered in private? A baptism is a declaration of commitment. The candidate for baptism wants the world to know that he loves Jesus and wants to follow him. The individual being baptized is stating his intent. Baptism is a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. It is a confession that Jesus is Christ and Lord. Baptism as anything other than a reminder of what Christ has already accomplished on the cross and done in the life of the individual being baptized is a distortion. Baptism cannot be understood apart from Christ crucified.
3. **Invitation:** Those who observe a baptism are not passive observers. They are active participants. The church is to encourage, support, and exhort the individual being baptized to remain faithful and true to Christ Jesus.
4. **Imitation:** We are following the example of Jesus Christ who was baptized by immersion. Baptism is an essential aspect of discipleship. In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus tells his followers to make disciples. This is the mission of the church. "Baptizing" and "teaching" specify the way in which disciples are to be made. Discipleship includes the baptism of converts and teaching them to obey the commands of Jesus.
5. **Incorporation:** Baptism is an entry point into the body of Christ associated with faith in Jesus Christ. It is an initiatory rite – we are baptized *into* the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism maintains the unity of believers (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13). It is shared by those who belong to Christ and are now to be incorporated into the life of the church. Baptism in water and in Spirit is the signature event for all Christians, marking them as members of the people of God.⁵

A great next step for those who are baptized is to become a member of the church. This is appropriate for young people as well as adults.

Talk about it together

As a family work through this question and activity:

1. As a family read Romans 6:1-5 and Colossians 2:11-15. According to these passages what is the meaning of baptism?
2. Role play: You are walking through the hall of your school (or if you are home schooled substitute a public setting) and a curious classmate approaches you with the following question. "Hey, I heard you got baptized last weekend. That's cool, but I don't understand what it means. Why did you do that? Weren't you baptized as a baby?"

Step 5: WHO can be baptized?

Begin by answering this question, "According to Acts 8:12-13 and 35-38, what are the requirements to be baptized?"

Baptism is for believers in Jesus Christ. Baptism is designed for believers who have repented of their sins and have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is for those who have met the conditions for salvation: repentance and an active faith. A personal, conscious faith in Jesus Christ is the prerequisite to baptism. This is why baptism is often referred to as "believer's baptism." To be baptized and then believe in Jesus would reverse the biblical order.

The book of Acts provides a number of examples that indicate belief comes before baptism:

Acts 8:12	But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized , both men and women.
Acts 8:13	Simon himself believed and was baptized .
Acts 10:43-48	All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. While Peter was still speaking these words, ... Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
Acts 16:14-15	One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized , she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.
Acts 16:31-33	They replied, " Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized .
Acts 18:8	Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized .
Acts 19:4-5	And Paul said, "John baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Believer's baptism is the clear teaching of the New Testament. Only those who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior should be baptized. This does two things (1) It helps preserve the Gospel and correct doctrine of the church. Baptism points to Christ and is a picture of his death and resurrection. (2) It demonstrates that the church consists of believers in Jesus (Hebrews 8:11). The church is not a mixed community of believers and unbelievers; it consists of those who have confessed faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, baptism is not for unbelievers. The New Testament offers no clear instance of nonbelievers being baptized. There are three applications from these passages:

1. **Every Christian is to be baptized.** An unbaptized Christian is not a state of existence that the Bible recognizes; nor should it be for Christians today. The natural progression for the Christian is to believe and then to be baptized.
2. **Belief in Jesus is the only requirement for baptism.** In the New Testament, nothing was required for baptism other than repentance of sins and belief in Jesus. A time of instruction prior to baptism is acceptable, but should not be a hindrance to being baptized. In church history there have been periods where candidates for baptism had to devote a significant amount of time, sometimes years, to studying the core doctrines of the faith before being baptized. While all individuals should rigorously study the foundations of the faith, this aspect of discipleship should not be a requirement for baptism as this is not the pattern of the New Testament.
3. **Infants should not be baptized.** Every New Testament instruction or command regarding baptism, and every clear instance of baptism that we see in the New Testament, relates to the baptism of those who have repented of sin (John's baptism) and come to faith in Christ (baptisms from Pentecost forward).⁶ Such requirements mean that infants and very young children should not be baptized until they have been united with Christ through their own faith in him.



The foundational teaching of the Bible is that human beings are sinful and can be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). Infant baptism compromises the Gospel by counting the faith of the parent as covering the child or in presumptive future regeneration of the child.⁷ Those who are baptized in the New Testament have already undergone a spiritual change of heart through the work of the Holy Spirit. The pattern of the New Testament is belief then baptism not baptism in hopes of future belief.

John 4:1-2 makes clear that Jesus, through his disciples, made and baptized more people than John the Baptist. Yet none of these baptisms are specified to be children. In fact, to be a disciple requires belief and repentance (Mark 1:15), something an infant is incapable of doing. Jesus took a special interest in children. He received them into his arms and blessed them. He did not baptize them.⁸

If this argument is correct, then large portions of the church are living in disobedience to Christ when baptizing an infant. If all the New Testament evidence shows baptism connected to those who profess faith in Jesus, the burden of proof rests on those who claim infant baptism is biblical.

It is sometimes assumed that infants were present in Cornelius's home and that they were baptized with the rest of the family. However, the book of Acts tell us that those who were baptized in 10:48 and 11:17 "heard the word" (10:44), "received the Holy Spirit" (10:45), "spoke in tongues (10:46), "believed in the Lord Jesus Christ" (11:17), and "repented" (11:18).⁹ Infants and very young children are not capable of these actions so it is safe to assume that Luke does not intend for his readers to believe that infants were involved in this household baptism. When Crispus' household was baptized in Acts 18:8, we are told that Crispus with his entire household believed in the Lord. Very young children cannot believe, thus can be excluded from those baptized in Acts 18.



The Bible provides no evidence for the baptism of infants. If belief is to precede baptism, then infants and very young children are incapable of that which is required to participate in this rite. Paul Jewett believes "to baptize infants apart from faith threatens the evangelical foundations of evangelicalism."¹⁰ We have strong evidence to reject infant baptism and to focus on the biblical principle of believer's baptism. Baptism should be practiced only by those who profess faith in Jesus and whose fruit is evident for all to see. The important question becomes, "Does this individual publicly display their faith?"

What about re-baptism? There is one instance of individuals being re-baptized in Scripture. In Acts 19:1-15 we read:

"While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?' 'John's baptism,' they replied. Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus."

These individuals were baptized for a second time because they had not repented of sins and placed their faith in Jesus. The text is clear, the Ephesian disciples had not believed in Jesus prior to their first baptism, and as a result, Paul instructs them to be baptized again. It is important to note that Paul did not immediately baptize these individuals, but told them to believe in Jesus. The same principle of Acts 19 can be applied to those who have been baptized as a baby. Because belief was not present before an infant baptism, it is appropriate to be baptized as a believer.

The validity of a baptism does not rest on the character of the one who performs it. Because it is God's promise, the validity of the baptism rests on God's character. Because baptism is a sign of God's promise, it is not to be administered to a believer more than once. To be baptized more than once is to doubt the integrity of God's promise.

Talk about it together

As a family, work through these questions and activities:

1. If you have not done so already, read the Acts passages out loud making sure to point out the occurrence of belief before baptism in each passage.
2. As a family, search the book of Acts and see if there is any evidence for infants or non-believers being baptized.
3. Ask your child, "What hinders you from being baptized?" (This was the same question the Eunuch asked in Acts 8:35-38). Does your child believe in Jesus? Is there evidence of regeneration? Are there fears that need to be overcome? Is there an understanding of the significance and meaning of baptism?

Step 6: WHEN can an individual be baptized?

How old does a child need to be before they are ready to be baptized? The nature of baptism clearly taught in scripture is that it is only for those who profess saving faith. The Bible provides no minimum age required for baptism, nor does the Bible give any command for immediate baptism or delay. As such, theologians hold differing views on this matter.

1. **Immediate baptism.** This position suggests that young people should be baptized at the earliest possible time after conversion.

It is argued that this is the pattern of Scripture. The Philippian jailer, the apostle Paul, and the Ethiopian Eunuch were baptized soon after believing in Jesus (Acts 16:30-34 and Acts 9:18). Thus, it is encouraged that a young person follow this pattern and be baptized as close to conversion as possible. Andreas Kostenberger believes that young people, as early as seven or eight, should be permitted to be baptized if they have genuinely understood the implications of Christ's death on their behalf, repented of their sins, and placed their faith in Jesus Christ.¹¹

2. **Delay for maturity.** This position holds that the believers who are baptized in the Bible are adults and there is no clear instance of an adolescent being baptized. Waiting to baptize provides time for the child to understand the Gospel and articulate its meaning. Charles Spurgeon required his sons to wait until they were eighteen years old before they could be baptized.¹² Mark Dever states,

"This practice of delaying for maturity—similar to other delays commanded in Scripture (e.g., marriage, responsibility in OT Israel, service in the army in the OT)—is common around the world today and was formerly common in the United States. Baptisms of children eight or nine years of age, or even younger, were either unheard of or very rare."¹³

Grace Church leans toward the second view and believes it is ideal to wait until the child is at least 11 years of age before consideration for baptism occurs. This provides time for evidence of regeneration and understanding of the Gospel. On special occasions children younger than 11 may be baptized; the key is to absolutely sure the young person understands the Gospel and has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ.

Step 7: HOW is a believer baptized?

The way which individuals were baptized in the New Testament was most likely immersion. Individuals being baptized fully went under water rather than being sprinkled or having water poured over them. There is ample evidence that immersion was the mode of baptism. Evidence for immersion:

1. **The meaning of the word.** Baptism is a transliteration of the Greek word “Baptizo” which means to “dip, immerse, submerge.”¹⁴ Another Greek word “Rhantizo”: meaning “to pour” or “to sprinkle” is never used to describe baptism.
2. **Jesus was immersed by John** (Mark 1:10). We are told that Jesus “came up immediately from the water” (Matt. 3:16). This description suggests immersion as Jesus would not need much water in order to be sprinkled with water.
3. **John baptized “in the river Jordan”** (Mark 1:5; Matt. 3:6) and at Aenon near Salim “because water was plentiful there” (John 3:23). Both of these descriptions suggest baptism by immersion as one does not need a river or a plentiful supply of water to be sprinkled.
4. **The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch suggests immersion**, “Look, here is water!” (Acts 8:36) This would be an unusual comment unless the baptized involved immersion. If there be any doubt Luke further clarifies when he states the Ethiopian eunuch “went down into the water” (Acts 8:38) and “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:39).
5. **The imagery of Romans 6:1-4**, being “buried with him in baptism,” fits best with immersion. To go under water suggests being buried with Christ while rising from the water suggests living a new life in Christ. This imagery is lost if a different mode is utilized.

Who can baptize? Is it appropriate for a parent to baptize a child? While there is no Scriptural command restricting baptism to pastors or elders, this has been the normal mode of operation throughout church history. The parent is the primary spiritual educator of the child, but the performing of ordinances (The Lord’s Supper and Baptism) has typically been administered by the leaders of the church. In this instance, it is best to follow in the footsteps of the church fathers and limit the act of baptism to pastors and elders. As a result, pastors can make sure that a baptism is administered properly and that abuses are avoided.

Step 8: Prepare your testimony

It is not uncommon for a baptism candidate to be intimidated or fearful about sharing a testimony. In some cases this fear has been significant enough to hinder a young person from being baptized. Your role as a parent is to help quiet any of these fears and to encourage the young person to continue with the process. Three actions help remove fear (1) Prayer. Ask God to give peace and confidence to your child. (2) Preparation. Take all guesswork out of the process and write out the testimony word-for-word, using 3-5 sentences. Some candidates use a half sheet of paper while others use a 3 x 5 card. (3) Practice. The more opportunities the young person has to practice their testimony the more comfortable he or she will be when the time comes for the baptism. The goal is not to read the manuscript, but to become familiar enough with the testimony that the notes are not even needed or used as a launch pad or guiderail.

Every person has a story to tell. Whether you became a follower of Jesus Christ as a young child or later in life – you have a great testimony. It is great because it is your story. Don’t buy into the myth that your testimony is boring if you don’t have a Hollywood script to talk about – drugs, alcohol, or gangs. It is equally exciting to see God grab hold of a drug dealer’s heart or a child’s heart. Your testimony should communicate that Jesus and the Gospel are precious to you and that he has changed your heart.



Preparing your testimony is an important step in life. Peter tells us to always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have. Sharing your testimony with others is a powerful way to provide an answer for the hope that you have. A changed life is attractive. It is likely that others will want what they see in your life. You are simply telling them the reason for your joy.

Part of your preparation for baptism is to write a brief testimony which explains why you are being baptized and why you became a Christian. You will want to practice your testimony so that you are comfortable sharing it with others.

Goals when sharing your testimony

- **Emphasize Christ**—Jesus should be the focus of your testimony, not you. It is God who brings about new life and it is God who should receive the credit. A testimony is an opportunity to glorify God.
- **Emphasize new life**—No matter how messy your past was - the main point is that God has changed you and that you are a completely different person.

The steps are designed to help you write your testimony. They apply for both long and short, written and spoken testimonies. These tips and steps will help you tell others with sincerity, impact and clarity what God has done in your life.

1. **Study an example of a testimony from the Bible.** *As a family read Acts 26.* In this passage, the Apostle Paul gives his testimony. It is a wonderful example that we can learn from. *What do you notice about Paul's testimony? What is the response of others to his story?*
2. **Use a 3-point outline.** A three-point approach is very effective in communicating your personal testimony. The outline focuses on **before** you trusted Christ, **how** you surrendered to him, and the difference **since** you've been walking with him. Key questions are in italics.



- **Before:** Simply tell what your life was like before you surrendered to Christ. What were you searching for before coming to know Christ? *Why did you need salvation? What was the key problem, emotion, situation or attitude you were dealing with?* What motivated you? What were your actions? How did you try to satisfy your inner needs? (Examples of inner needs are loneliness, fear of death, and insecurity. Possible ways to fill those needs include work, money, drugs, relationships, sports, or sex.)
- **How:** How were you converted? Simply tell the events and circumstances that caused you to consider Christ as the solution to your searching. Take time to identify the steps that brought you to the point of trusting Christ. Where were you? What was happening at the time? What people or problems influenced your decision? *How did God bring you to the point where you knew you needed salvation in Jesus Christ?*
- **Since:** *How has Christ made a difference in your life? How has his forgiveness impacted you? How did you benefit from what Christ did?* How have your thoughts, attitudes and emotions changed? Share how Christ is meeting your needs and what a relationship with Him means to you now.

Encourage your child to utilize Scripture as he or she answers these questions. It is appropriate to include one or two key Bible verses in the testimony. Parents can help guide this process but should not write the young person's testimony. This is often a struggle for many young people, provide encouragement and support when needed and help if the child is stuck, but allow the young person the joy of sharing what God has placed on his or her heart.

3. Important tips to remember

- **Stick to the point.** Your conversion and new life in Christ should be the main points.
- **Be specific.** Include events, genuine feelings and personal insights that clarify your main point. This makes your testimony tangible - something others can relate to.
- **Be current.** Tell what is happening in your life with God now, today.
- **Be honest.** Don't exaggerate or dramatize your life for effect. The simple truth of what God has done in your life is all the Holy Spirit needs to convict others of their sin and convince them of his love and grace.
- **Be brief.** Most individuals will listen for 30-60 seconds before glazing over. Aim to tell what God has done in your life in the amount of time it takes to ride on an elevator.

Step 9: Plan the celebration

Parents, this last section is just for you. Your child's baptism is a major milestone and should be celebrated. Your child will be receiving a baptism certificate from Grace Church to help remember this important occasion. There are two ways parents can celebrate a young person's baptism and my encouragement is to do both:

1. **Special meal.** Go out to a nice restaurant or cook a gourmet meal at home. During the meal it would be special if both father and mother chose a passage of Scripture that they read to the child with words of encouragement and affirmation. You may wish to write your child a note to commemorate this special day. Guaranteed, they will save it and read it many times.

2. **Special gift.** Purchase a gift that is costly and spiritually symbolic of something you wish to emphasize with your child. In the past, parents have purchased rings, necklaces, crosses, pens, a framed scripture passage, and a leather Bible with the child's name on it. Be creative and come up with something that is significant and will be saved for life. I have seen children walking around with baptism gifts years after their baptism. So, put thought into this gift and be intentional with the opportunity.

Disability and Baptism

A word to our families who have a child with a developmental disability. Perhaps these questions have come to mind:

- Can my disabled child come to faith in Christ?
- Will my child automatically go to heaven because he has a developmental disability?
- Can a person with a disability be baptized?

Can my disabled child come to faith in Christ?

89% of developmentally disabled people are considered in the teachable category. Thus, the majority of developmentally disabled people are capable of learning. Romans 10:17 teaches that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Wise parents teach children the Bible early, often and focus that message on Jesus Christ. Parents of a child with a disability, no matter its severity, will bless the child by reading the life-giving words of Scripture and explaining the gospel to the child.

There may be only one or two words indicating a response; sometimes no response can be detected. But God knows the heart. His word does not return void as he says in Isaiah 55:11.

We can be confident that as God's word is poured into our children with developmental disabilities, the Holy Spirit is at work in their hearts.

But what of the disabled child who does not have the cognitive ability to understand the gospel? Who are we to make a judgment whether a person is worthy or unworthy to receive the message of Christ? We are to share that message with every person, no matter the condition of their heart, state in life, or the level of cognitive ability. Didn't many of us sing and talk to our children before they were born? We knew understanding was limited, but we spoke to our child because we believed that our words would impact the child at some level. Nothing should deter a parent from telling a child of the magnificent love of Jesus.

Will my child automatically go to heaven because he has a developmental disability?

All men, women, and children are in need of a Savior and that includes individuals with a developmental disability. Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned. All people, including those with a disability, have fallen short of God's standard of perfection. Because God is a just God he does not ignore sin, and therefore, no one is exempt from God's condemnation. Children with a disability need Jesus to be their Lord and Savior.

For those children who do not have the cognitive ability to understand the gospel we trust in the grace and mercy of God. We have confidence in a loving God who welcomes the little children. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14.

Can a person with a disability be baptized?

We want to avoid two faulty reactions to a candidate's desire for baptism. We do not want to baptize a person just to baptize them. Nor do we want to restrict a qualified person from being baptized. Thus, we approach each baptism with care and individual attention. We seek God's leading and desire to obey the commands and patterns taught in the Bible.

Biblically, belief in Jesus is to precede baptism. This criteria is to be applied in all situations to all people. While it is impossible to know a person's heart there should be a high level of confidence regarding a person's faith in Jesus. Parents will be relied upon to help determine whether a disabled child is ready for baptism. It is the parent who knows the child best. They are the one who often see evidence of faith that others cannot.

It has been suggested that individuals with developmental disabilities are not able to "understand enough" about faith and salvation to be baptized. Ron Vredevel, a well known author on disability, states

"The kind of knowing that faith requires is an intimate, trusting, person-to-person sort of knowing not confused by the speed or breadth of one's intelligence. Our friends with developmental disabilities often show a high level of trust, exhibiting the simple faith that Jesus acknowledged when he blessed the children whom the disciples had intended to turn away."

It has been our experience that individuals with developmental disabilities, who have shown interest in being baptized, have done so in their later teen or early adult years. Typically, the child and parent have sensed there is sufficient evidence of faith and the time is right to be baptized. If the parent is convinced a child is ready to be baptized the next step is to meet with a pastoral staff to confirm this leading.

We will adapt the baptism process where we need to in order to make it a meaningful and positive experience. We can provide a volunteer to walk with the individual and his family through the baptism process. That volunteer can be someone who already knows the family, knows what the student understands, and is familiar with his communication style and responses.

Depending on the person, the usual pre-baptism interview questions can be adapted. They look like this:

Do you love Jesus?
How does Jesus help you?
Will you see Jesus someday?

Sometimes the "answers" have been only a smile or a gesture with the hand because words are not there. The Holy Spirit knows the response of the heart. A couple of our students have been more comfortable being videotaped rather than sharing their interview "live." We can plan a "dry run" ahead of time. Some have been more comfortable having a volunteer or family member go in the water with him.

God created all children for his glory and purpose. The baptism of a child confirms this truth, proclaims God's salvation, and helps a parent reconcile the fact that the child is created as God intended. Psalm 139 says, "I praise you, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." A baptism provides the opportunity to celebrate the blessing of your child and the work of God in his or her life. We, at Grace Church and the Barnabas Disability Ministry, want to partner with you in teaching all of your children about our loving Savior and His desire for all to come to the knowledge of his saving power and follow in the waters of baptism.

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Unless noted, all Bible quotes are from New International Version 1984

¹David Michaels, *Preparing Young People For Baptism* (Minneapolis, MN: Children Desiring God, 2011), 12.

²David Michael has a helpful and concise chapter on explaining the Gospel to children in the context of baptism in his book, *Preparing Young People for Baptism*, and can be purchased at www.childrendesiringGOD.org

³Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (), 89

⁴The New Testament also contains passages where individuals are baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48; Gal. 3:27, Rom. 6:3). This should not be problematic as the practice of baptizing in the name of Jesus implies the three-in-oneness of the Trinity.

⁵Thomas R. Schriener, “Baptism in the Epistles” Thomas R. Schriener & Shawn D. Wright, Eds. *Believer’s Baptism: Sing of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2006), 72.

⁶Bruce A. Ware, “Believer’s Baptism View” David F. Wright, Ed. *Baptism: Three Views* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 23.

⁷Thomas R. Schriener & Shawn D. Wright, *Believer’s Baptism: Sing of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2006), 2.

⁸*Ibid.*, Introduction.

⁹Robert H. Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts” Thomas R. Schriener & Shawn D. Wright, Eds. *Believer’s Baptism: Sing of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2006), 62.

¹⁰Paul Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 162.

¹¹Andreas J. Kostenberger, “Baptism in the Gospels” Thomas R. Schriener & Shawn D. Wright, Eds. *Believer’s Baptism: Sing of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2006), 33.

¹²Mark Dever, “Baptism in the Context of the Local Church” Thomas R. Schriener & Shawn D. Wright, Eds. *Believer’s Baptism: Sing of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2006), 345.

¹³*Ibid.*, 346.

¹⁴Bruce A. Ware, “Believer’s Baptism View” David F. Wright, Ed. *Baptism: Three Views* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 21.