

## **Parent's Guide for the Baptism of Children**

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## Introduction

Baptism is an exciting step in the life of every believer in Christ. It can be particularly exciting and rewarding for parents to see their child baptized. We believe that the primary responsibility to evangelize and disciple children rests with the parents (Deuteronomy 6: 5-9). Our mission as a church and in children's ministry is to support the family in developing strong and devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. To that end, we have created this guide to equip you, the parent, to help your child come to a biblical understanding of baptism.

First, we want to give a brief overview of our understanding of baptism and the supporting scriptural basis. We also will address common questions related to baptizing children. Finally, we will offer a step-by-step process you can work through with your child. This process will typically take weeks and will help you determine if your child is ready for baptism or if more time is needed.

## Overview

An important starting point in understanding what the Bible says about baptism is that Jesus commanded it (Matthew 28:19). We do not consider the act of baptism to be necessary for salvation, but it is necessary if we are to be obedient to Christ. Not only are we obeying Jesus' command, but we are also following his example, for he himself was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17). At Grace Family Church we believe in **believers' baptism**: *that baptism is appropriately administered only to those who give a believable profession of faith in Jesus Christ.*

We also practice the New Testament example of baptism by *immersion*, which is to put the person being baptized completely under the water and then brought back up again.

## The Symbolism of Baptism

There are several important and beautiful truths revealed in baptism that deserve a brief mention. The symbolism of union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection is indicated in baptism by immersion. It symbolizes physically what happens to us spiritually when we believe in Christ.

### **Romans 6:3-4**

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

### **Colossians 2:12**

You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Scripture also uses the image of water to communicate that we have been washed and cleansed of our sin.

### **Acts 22:16**

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

The previous scriptures also highlight the reason for baptism in the first place; namely, that your child has been born again! That they have turned away from their sin and placed their complete trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and for salvation to eternal life. That they are now a child of God that has been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus (Colossians 1:13). That all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

## Common Questions

### **1. How do I know when my child is ready to be baptized?**

It is important to be sure that a child knows what they are doing, otherwise later, as adults, they often feel the need to be baptized again, which is not something most churches like to encourage. So, if you have your child baptized before he or she is ready, you really do them a disservice later in life.

The best way to know that a child is ready is when *they* initiate the desire to be baptized. Be mindful of peer pressure, not the usual negative type, but kids doing it because one of their friends did it. It needs to come from a personal conviction and understanding. Asking kids *why* they want to be baptized will tell you a lot!

One of the key things to look for in your child is the evidence of a changed heart. The following list is not exhaustive and is only a guide in what to look for:

- Does your child demonstrate remorse and sorrow over their sin?
- Does your child know he has sinned against God and not just others?
- Does your child confess her sin to God and ask for mercy without prompting?
- Does your child show a sense of relief and forgiveness?
- Does your child have a new love for God?
- Does your child show a change in attitude (joy, peace, patience)?
- Does your child show a desire to read the Bible or pray?
- Does your child show genuine concern for others?

## **2. How old should children be before they are baptized?**

The most direct answer is that they should be old enough to give a believable profession of faith and genuine evidence of conversion (see above). It is impossible to set an exact age because each child is different in temperament and in their ability to communicate, but it is important that children be able to give a basic understanding of the gospel, why they need a savior, and how they are saved. If all a child is able to articulate is that they want to “ask Jesus into their hearts” we recommend waiting for baptism. It is a Godly desire to see our children saved, but it is important that we not rush our children into a profession of faith, and thus communicate to them that they are saved when, in reality, they may have not personally, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, repented and believed in Christ.

### 3. How do I make my child's baptism memorable?

First, realize that we are presenting a baptism process that is designed as an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with your child. We recommend that you plan a celebration in honor of your child with family members and friends present.

#### The Process of Baptism Preparation

The following process for baptism preparation has two main goals. The first is to confirm that your child has, in fact, been born again, and to review their understanding of the Gospel and the meaning of baptism. The second goal is to provide structured opportunities to strengthen the relationship with your child as you contemplate and discuss spiritual matters.

Before you start, **pray**. As you begin the process you may begin to have doubts in your ability to talk to your child about scripture, or you may feel that your relationship with your child is not where it should be to lead them through this process. Relax, it is common for every parent to have similar feelings at some point. Remember that you are called to be obedient, and that you are trusting in God's grace as well.

As the Lord reminded Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." We cannot stress enough that, before you begin the process, you prepare the way through intentional and focused prayer.

Be sure that you are walking in obedience to the Lord and are not deliberately sinning against the Lord. Pray that God would move in a powerful and life-changing way in your child's (and your) heart.

Secondly, **plan** your meeting times. It is important that you set aside some time to meet privately with your child. This will communicate that these times are important and should be taken seriously. In establishing a regular time, perhaps you could arrange a special place to meet with your child; maybe your child's favorite breakfast place for example.

## Goals for Baptism Preparation Sessions

There are four major goals to cover in the baptism readiness process with your child. There is a lot to cover here, so we suggest you take several weeks, meeting once per week, to ensure your child has time to process and absorb all that is discussed. Remember the two-fold purpose of the baptism preparation process: 1) to confirm the conversion of your child and ensure an understanding of the gospel and baptism, and 2) to strengthen the spiritual bond and relationship with your child through the process.

### **1. Goal One: Explore your child's assurance of salvation**

Teenagers who have grown up in Christian homes and have had early experiences with the Lord are often prone to doubt and uncertainty about the authenticity of their faith.

They may ask themselves, “do I believe just because I was taught to believe a certain way,” or “am I genuinely and personally trusting in Christ?”

Be sure to give your elementary-aged child ample opportunity to express any questions or doubts that they may be wrestling with. Encourage them to be open and honest about thoughts and feelings concerning the Lord. Assure them that there is no such thing as a stupid question. Help your child discern the authenticity of their faith and embrace it as their own. Avoid telling your children the answer you want them to give. You should also focus on the heart of your child by talking with them about the following texts:

**Isaiah 29:13**

The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.”

**1 Samuel 16:7**

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

**2. Goal Two: Review the Gospel with your child**

Paul said in Romans 1:16 that the Gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”



Since baptism dramatizes the reality of this Gospel power in your child's life, it is important that they not only experience the saving power of the Gospel, but also embrace a biblical understanding of it. The goal here is to clarify and deepen your child's understanding of, and appreciation for, the Gospel. You might ask them:

- What is your understanding of sin and the consequences of sin?
- Why did Jesus have to die?
- How does Jesus' death accomplish our salvation?
- What must we do to be saved?

You do not need to look for perfect theology. Simple faith with limited understanding is okay for now. You mainly want to see what your child already understands so that you can build on it.

### **3. Goal Three: Help your child describe the saving work of God in their life**

Before a child is baptized, they are often given one or two opportunities to describe the Lord's saving work in their life and to give a more extensive profession of faith. It is important to help your child articulate this experience in their own words.

While the words your child uses are important, it is just as important that the words are sincere and heartfelt. The goal of this talk is for your child to be able to share their testimony, and, in so doing, encourage those already in the faith and also to be a witness to those who have yet to believe in Christ.

First, explain the goal of this session and illustrate it by describing how Christ brought you to Himself. The sharing of your testimony with your child will be a model that they can build upon as they begin to share their own. Then, ask your child to describe how the Lord made Himself known and how God brought them to faith in Jesus Christ. Have them describe any significant experiences along the way. Your child's testimony should reflect an understanding of sin and their resolve to trust in Jesus for forgiveness and to follow Him in obedience. Also encourage your child to describe their relationship with the Lord. What new things are especially precious to them now? What new things are they discovering about the Lord? What are the struggles?

It may be easier for them to prepare a written version of their testimony first, but encourage them to express themselves without reading it. The more relaxed and natural they can be when sharing their testimony, the easier it will be for others to recognize as authentic and sincere.

#### **4. Goal Four: Help your child understand the meaning and significance of baptism**

The following are just a few talking points regarding the significance of baptism:

- **Baptism is immersion into water**

This is the basic meaning of the word *baptism*, but for the Christian its meaning is much deeper and richer.

- **Baptism is an act of obedience to the Lord's command to follow His example**

#### **Matthew 28:18-20**

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- **Baptism is a symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus.**

#### **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

- **Baptism is a symbol of what God has accomplished in the life of a believer**

Baptism is a symbol of the spiritual change that God has worked in our lives. It is a transition from spiritual and eternal death to spiritual and eternal life.

It is moving from hopelessness into hopefulness, from darkness into light, and from slavery to sin to freedom in Christ. In baptism we symbolically express our acceptance of death with Christ, putting an end to our old way of life and rising with Christ to begin a new kind of life in Him.

**Romans 6:3-11**

do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

- **Baptism is a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ**

In baptism we express, with our whole body, our heart's acceptance of Christ's Lordship.

Becoming a Christian involves the body as well as the heart. In conversion, the heart is freed from sin to be enslaved to God.

**Romans 6:12-13**

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Explain that since the Lordship of Christ lays claim to our whole body, it is fitting for us to express our surrender to His lordship with our whole body.

- **Baptism is only for believers**

At Grace Family Church we wholeheartedly believe that children can be saved (Matthew 19:13-14, Mark 10:13-14). Since baptism is a symbol of beginning the Christian life, it is clear that we should only baptize when there is evidence of new birth and the child is able to give a credible profession of faith in Christ.

- **Baptism is a blessing**

Your child should understand by now that baptism does not accomplish our salvation, but they should not miss the great blessing in the baptism experience.

## Scheduling the Baptism of Your Child

Upon completion of the baptism readiness material, you will have a better understanding as to whether your child is ready for baptism:

If it has become apparent to you that they are in fact ready, please ensure the baptism registration card contained within our Water Baptism brochure is completed and turned into the church office.

If they are not yet ready for baptism, this is okay. Continue to pray for your child and live the Christian life before them and trust God to bring them to that point in his timing.

## Final Words

The salvation and baptism of our children is one of the most exciting things to be a part of as parents, family and caregivers. We pray that you and your child grow closer during this process and that your child's love for the Lord increases every day. We commend you for shepherding your child through this process and look forward to seeing them grow strong as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The contents of this booklet were adapted for our use from *Preparing Your People for Baptism* from Desiring God Ministries and *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem.