

JONATHAN WHITCOMB

# GOSPEL READY



*Conversations to Prepare  
Your Child for Baptism*

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Published by Every Woman a Theologian LLC

Cover design by Olivia Smith.

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Printed in the United States of America.

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## INTRODUCTION

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*“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)*

For Christian parents, few things bring more joy than seeing our children live godly lives. As they grow beside us, we have the honor of stewarding their precious faith and preparing them for life. To raise godly kids takes more than bringing them to church or sending them to Christian programs. Our children need us. They look to us for guidance as we live our lives in faith and instruct them in theirs.

I’m sure many of us have spent hours praying and pondering the question: “How can I build a solid foundation for my child’s faith?” This may look like prayer at home, sharing the Bible as a family, or dedicated devotion time. It may look like choosing media for our kids that reflects God’s truth and building for them healthy, God-focused communities. When our faith permeates our lives sincerely and intentionally—when it weaves into our conversations, routines, and decisions—we model for our children what it means to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

But there are also times when we feel deeply inadequate. As our children grow, they go through seasons of questioning. Sometimes,

lies of the enemy creep in, sowing doubt and fear. Or maybe we see legalism taking root—patterns of trying to “measure up” in order to please God. Other times, the questioning may not be negative. We have the joy of seeing our children’s appetite for the Lord grow quick and voracious—until we realize how ill-equipped we feel to answer their torrent of questions.

It can be frightening when our children begin to ask us big questions about faith—especially if we do not know how to respond. But we do not have to hide from these serious conversations. Instead, we can prepare not only to show them a godly life but to instruct them—help them to understand what our example really means in light of the gospel. We can train them to seek out truth in the Word of God. This is the heart of discipleship.

*Gospel Ready* helps equip you to have these sorts of conversations with your kids. This book has two parts. Part one is a brief parents’ guide. These notes give you a “brush up” on the topic at hand. They are short and sweet, but they have the depth you need to feel confident. Part two contains seven devotionals to serve as springboards for discussion with your kids. Each devotional contains a passage of Scripture to read together, discussion questions to direct your conversation, and for very little children, an activity to help them stay engaged.

These devotions are not for reading in one sitting, and the questions are not meant for answering with a single sentence. This is meant to be a back-and-forth conversation with your child as you make room for their questions and seek out answers in Scripture together. This format allows you to tailor the study experience for your child’s needs.

For the very young, you may do more prompting and illustration. For older children, you may be surprised by how easily the conversation flows as they ask the questions on their heart.

It is vital to remember that discipleship is not about legislating faith down to our children. Discipleship is about nurturing, encouraging, and drawing out of them a real, personal faith. Through diving into the pages of Scripture together, you are showing them in action and in word that the Bible is the place to go with their deepest questions. You are showing them in practice what Hebrews 4:12 means when it says,

*“For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

We do not seek out Scripture because it earns God's favor. We come to the Bible as we are, and Jesus meets us there with His Holy Spirit. We are showing our kids that the gospel is about God's grace and love, and our response to this is to follow after Him and seek His truth. You are teaching them that the Word of God is not something to be intimidated or afraid of. It is a shield to defend them when they are troubled, and a sword for their protection. You are training them to be gospel ready: quick to run to the Word with their questions, aware of the Holy Spirit's guiding, and wrapped in the grace of Jesus. That is a foundation of faith stable enough to last your child for all of eternity.

## PART ONE

# Parents' Guide: Believer's Baptism

Imagine it's Sunday morning. You're just winding down from your "rushing out the door" routine: combing hair, checking that everyone has socks and that no shirts are inside out, and piling in the car to head to church. Worship wraps up and everyone settles into their seats for church announcements before the sermon starts. They run through the usual fundraisers, mission trips, the summer potluck, and the date for the next Baptism service. Your child turns to you and whispers: "Can I get baptized...?"

Ten or twelve things jump through your mind at this pop-up question. Somewhere between "Are we going to be in town that weekend?" and "We have to invite Great-Aunt Barb," the *big* questions come: "Is my child *ready*? What does *ready* mean? How can I prepare for making a decision of this weight?"



Whether you have been caught unawares or you are trying to lay groundwork before that day comes, these are good questions. For our children, Baptism is the momentous occasion where they proclaim their faith as their own. This can be a wonderful moment where family and community rally around them as they dedicate their life to Christ. It can also be a unique moment of personal closeness to Jesus, where they acknowledge that they are His and He is theirs and that He will never leave them. In a world full of trouble and uncertainty, Baptism can be a moment of grounding, where they understand the steadiness they have found in Christ. For Christian parents, few things are as exciting, or as worth celebrating, as this.

The fuller an understanding a child has of Baptism—what it means and represents—the more of a treasure this celebration can be, not just for us as parents but for them. So how can we shepherd our children toward this wonderful decision? How can we share with them this fullness and magnitude in a way that multiplies our children's security and joy?

As a pastor, I have walked alongside many families as they approach this subject. It's a joyful and sacred occasion, but it's also one that requires careful discernment and prayerful patience. To begin this journey, let's dig into Baptism as a whole—a little refresher, if you will, into what Baptism is, what it symbolizes, and its biblical roots. From there, we will explore the stance of Believer's Baptism specifically and the Scripture and Church history from which this conviction takes shape. From atop this vantage point, we will explore ways to shepherd our children in regards to this wonderful, holy celebration.

## Origins and Purpose of Baptism

Let's start with the barest of basics. Baptism is a ceremony performed by a pastor—or other Christian teacher such as a parent or grandparent—and a new or young believer. The teacher will dip the new believer below the water and raise them up again (or in some church traditions, sprinkle the new believer with water) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This ceremony will look different from church to church, but Baptism has been performed by followers of Christ since the very beginning.

The first mention of Baptism in the Bible was in association with the ministry of John the Baptist. The concept of ritual cleansing with water was not something new to Jews at the time. It was a practice associated with leaving behind something old and embracing something new along with rededication to God. But through John the

Baptist's ministry, this practice took on new meaning. His call for Jews to be baptized was: *"Repent, because the kingdom of Heaven has come near!"* (Matthew 3:2). He called them to confess and be cleansed in preparation of the coming Messiah:

*"I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* (Matthew 3:11)

John's ministry would have hammered home to the people of his time that lineage and Law was not enough. Even the most devout needed something more to be whole. He declared that something new was coming—something that would require a death of the old and a birth of the new through repentance and a fresh dedication to the Lord. That something was Jesus and His gift of the Holy Spirit. At the time, John the Baptist likely did not understand the fullness of Baptism as a symbol of grace. Today, we see a more complete picture in light of Jesus's finished work on the Cross. Baptism is described as an ordinance or sacrament and an association of a believer with Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. It is saying: "I am all in on being a follower of Jesus Christ."

To this day I am struck by how intentionally Jesus set out the pattern for this sacred act. He established Baptism in two ways: first by example through His own Baptism at the beginning of His ministry,

and second by direct ordinance after His resurrection through the Great Commission:

*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”*

This isn't a casual suggestion or an optional ritual. Jesus left us with authoritative, clear instructions. Baptism is also not a solo act. Even Jesus did not baptize Himself. Baptism is inherently a communal act, done within the context of a community of believers. That is why Baptism is so powerful: it is a step taken in obedience to Christ's command, a public declaration of a new life, and a beautiful unification of the Church. Baptism encompasses these four elements:

**Obedience:** Jesus told us that His followers should be baptized. To follow that command is to submit in obedience to Jesus. Jesus did not separate belief in Him from walking in His instruction. Baptism is a step in the path of laying down our old selves in exchange for a new life of following Jesus's commands and listening for the instruction of the Holy Spirit.

**Washed Clean:** Jesus has cleansed the sins of all who call upon His name. In Him, we are made new. This washing is a spiritual reality that the physical “washing” of Baptism symbolizes. Does this mean we never sin after Baptism? No. But we are no longer defined by the stain of sin, rather the pure, clean righteousness of God. When we claim Jesus, we are wrapped in His righteousness, and His Spirit helps us to walk in obedience without fear of condemnation.

**Affirmation:** Before Jesus rescued us, we were all dead in our sins. But through the divine mystery of the Trinity, God Himself came and died for us to pay that debt and raise us with Him through His resurrection. Through Baptism, we claim the truth of who Jesus is and the work He has done for us. It is a way for us to announce that we accept Jesus’s authority and love over us, and we accept His invitation to walk with and dwell in us through His Spirit. For those who baptize infants, affirmation does not come at the time of Baptism. In a sense, affirmation is the “completion” of Baptism once children are old enough to embrace this truth for themselves.

**Declaration:** Baptism is to publicly identify with Jesus's life (following in His ways), His death (dying to our old ways of sin), and His resurrection (we are alive and made new spiritually when we place our faith in Christ). Declaring our allegiance to Jesus Christ is serious business. In cultures where Christians are persecuted, Baptism is a radical step of faith. It might mean rejection from your community, estrangement from your family, or persecution. Even in places where being Christian is more "socially acceptable," Baptism is a serious declaration. It is a step of faith that sets you apart to God.

As the Church has grown through history, different denominations have developed varying opinions on how Baptism should be practiced—and most of these convictions look at Scripture to defend their stance. But most, if not all, can agree in some way with all four of these points. And we all can agree that Baptism is a beautiful expression of the gospel. It can be helpful to explore different denominational traditions on Baptism to understand how other Christians come to the viewpoints they hold. If your children have not already been baptized, most likely you hold some form of Believer's Baptism, which is the stance this book focuses on going forward! Next we will look at the biblical and historical background of this viewpoint, and how that affects the way we practice Baptism today.

## **BELIEVER'S BAPTISM**

“Believer’s Baptism” holds that Baptism is closest to biblical intent when a person has chosen for themselves to dedicate their life to Jesus. It signifies that you are no longer a lost, broken soul. You are a repentant, redeemed, and committed follower of Jesus Christ. It is a sign of commitment to a new way of living, a heart transformation that has begun to bear fruit, and an affirmation that the individual is a mature member of the Church.

If someone has not personally, willingly identified with Jesus, does not understand what that commitment entails, or does not yet show the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, they are not ready for Baptism. This holds true for both new believers and young children. If a child is not old enough to articulate their faith, or if they are too young to take part in general church life—discerning between true and false doctrine, being willing to learn from or administer correction, minister to others in word and in works, etc.—they may also be too young for Baptism.

The logic here is not that these individuals are not worthy: Baptism is never something we earn. It also does not mean they are not part of the Church. The idea is folks who don’t understand their faith will have a hard time living out their commitment. Lack of understanding also removes much of the personal impact from what should be an incredibly impactful moment. It is more meaningful to wait until the individual can truly understand the gravity and implications of their decision.

This stance comes from a combination of biblical reference and observation of the early church. In Peter's sermon on Pentecost, he puts the call to Baptism like this: "*Repent and be baptized.*" Believer's Baptism holds that this order is significant. In stories throughout the book of Acts, we see Baptism closely linked to a genuine profession of faith in Christ and repentance from sin. Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, Lydia, and the Philippian jailer—they are all examples of faith coming first. Baptism follows as the natural next step for someone who has put their trust in Christ.

We can also gain insight into early church practices through the Didache: a first-century manual for church life. This manuscript teaches that in those early days, new converts to Christianity—called *neophytes* or "the newly planted"—were not rushed into Baptism. Baptism came after rigorous instruction regarding Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and what following Jesus meant in an individual life. Baptism was a solemn, sacred ceremony and a final step of complete commitment—the moment a new believer went from a student to a mature Christian.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Even within Believer's Baptism, different churches will have different patterns and traditions.

At the church where I serve, we practice Baptism by immersion, and the phrase we proclaim as someone is baptized is, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, buried in the likeness of Christ's death



and raised in the likeness of Christ's resurrection." We make these events a very public affair. In the summer months, Baptism typically happens at a local beach on Sunday evenings. During July and August in northern Michigan, these beaches can get very crowded. We like it that way. Faith is not meant to be stagnant or private. Faith is active, alive, and kinetic . . . it moves outward, toward the lost and the hurting. In the winter months, we make Baptism part of our Sunday morning gathering. This is not as public as a local beach, but each member will still share their testimony before hundreds within the congregation.

We feel that this tradition adds a level of accountability and brings home the serious nature of the event. It also adds a sense of communal support and celebration as our whole church gathers around new believers! Sometimes children—and even some adults—can get pretty nervous about speaking in front of a crowd about their faith journey. That is understandable. But ultimately, this experience encourages boldness so they can continue to live out their faith with boldness after Baptism.

As parents, I encourage you to reflect on the history of Baptism that we have explored. This knowledge will help you prepare your child in a meaningful and long-lasting way. The details of your own child's Baptism are something you might consider discussing with your own pastor. It is crucial for parents and ministry leaders to collaborate in helping children understand what Baptism, and belief in Christ, truly means. Your pastor will let you know how your church performs this sacred ceremony and may have resources to help you prepare!

When I see children and their parents embrace this pattern of Baptism: rooted in command, recognized as a public affair, and embraced with a full understanding of the commitment behind it, my heart is encouraged. It's an act that aligns with Christ's divine pattern, and it carries with it the gravity, significance, and beauty of obeying our Lord and Savior. When your family approaches Baptism in this way, it becomes not just a ritual, but a powerful act of faith rooted in genuine love for Christ and a heart eager to follow Him.

This book is designed to help parents teach their children about the meaning and importance of baptism in a clear and age-appropriate way. It explains that baptism is a special and sacred moment when we are welcomed into God's family and the Church. Children ages 5-10 years old will learn that the water used in baptism is a symbol of being washed clean and starting a new life with God. The book introduces other key elements often present in baptism through Scripture-based questions and activities. This resource helps children understand that baptism is a gift from God, a sign of belonging, and the beginning of a lifelong relationship with Him. It's a helpful guide for families preparing for baptism or revisiting its meaning together as their child grows.



*Jonathan Whitcomb is a next-generation pastor at Genesis Church, devoted to inspiring and guiding young people. With a genuine heart for the youth, he focuses on building meaningful connections and helping them grow in faith. Jonathan is passionate about empowering the next generation to discover their purpose and make a positive impact in their communities through mentorship, dynamic teaching, and authentic relationships.*



VerityPublishers.com

ISBN 979-8-89562-007-6



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