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EQUIPPING PARENTS AND CHILDREN WITH A BIBLICAL  
THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION PRIOR TO BAPTISM AT  
MAMBRINO BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN GRANBURY, TEXAS

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Joseph Paul Duncan  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

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## PREFACE

This project has been years in the making. I want to thank David Powell, who helped me get the initial ideas together. My parents, Joey and Naomi Duncan, made it possible for me to attend seminary and work on this project. Many thanks to both of you. Diane Long graciously read every word, offering needed correction and encouragement along the way. My wife, Angela Duncan, kept me on track and made sure the work was being done for the kingdom and not to make a name for myself. To my joy, Angela has given me four wonderful daughters. Abby and Hannah have worked through this curriculum with me and I hope Sarah and Ruth will follow quickly in their sisters' steps. I want to thank Mambrino Baptist Church for graciously loving my family and following my leadership.

I owe a great debt to the faculty of Southern Seminary and particularly to my former pastor and current supervisor, Dr. Cook. Dr. Cook is the model of faithfulness as a pastor and scholar. I learned to be a pastor by submitting to you as my pastor. I grew by receiving your correction and encouragement.

Paul Duncan

Granbury, Texas

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The greatest blessing a person can experience is being born again through faith in Christ, who was crucified for sins and raised on the third day. After conversion and reconciliation to God, the next greatest blessing is being used by the Holy Spirit to help another person understand the gospel, believe in Jesus, and be born again. When that other person is your child, the joy is unspeakable.

Historically, Mambrino Baptist Church has held to the exclusivity of the gospel and the necessity of repentance and faith, followed by believer's baptism. Unfortunately, by failing to teach and understand conversion, some members have reduced the requirements for baptism to a simple desire to be baptized. This problem is most pronounced among children. Some parents do not take the time to teach the necessity of the new birth. Wanting their children to be saved, they equate salvation with baptism. As pastors, the temptation is to please parents and increase baptismal numbers. If left unchecked, this malpractice can lead to baptizing the unconverted. Pastors, therefore, must equip parents, and parents must disciple their children, to understand conversion prior to baptism. For these reasons, I feel compelled to address the issue of biblical conversion in the church where I serve as pastor.

#### **Context**

This ministry project took place in the context of Mambrino Baptist Church (MBC) in Granbury, Texas. The project is relevant because most members are quick to defend the necessity of believing in Jesus prior to being baptized, but few are able to articulate a biblical theology of conversion. For some, conversion means nothing more

than mental agreement with the historical facts of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Others read John 3 and admit a person must be born again, but there is little practical knowledge of what conversion entails. Members know it is important to be born again and be baptized, but many do not know what these biblical words denote. Additionally, parents want their children to be saved, then baptized in accordance with Scripture, but these parents often do not know what it means biblically for their children to be genuinely born again. What qualifies a person for baptism is often unknown. It is necessary, therefore, to restore a biblical theology of conversion among parents whose children are requesting baptism.

The current context of MBC is similar to most Southern Baptist Churches. Pastors teach the necessity of the new birth followed by biblical baptism. Members affirm regeneration before baptism, and the governing documents define regeneration and baptism well. However, few parents, when their children ask to be baptized, see it as a necessity to test that confession against true biblical conversion. A lack of a biblical understanding of conversion prior to baptism is creating problems throughout the age groups. It is encouraging, however, to see some families take the initiative to disciple their children and prepare them for baptism.

The normal pattern is for children to confess Jesus as Lord and ask to be baptized. Most children, however, are not able to explain the gospel or demonstrate any evidence of conversion. It is a great blessing that throughout MBC, the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, explained, and celebrated. At an early age, many children can define the gospel. In response to this mental knowledge of the gospel facts, some parents request baptism for their children. After conversations with the child, it becomes clear that the child shows no signs of personal remorse over sin or age appropriate allegiance to Christ. There is an accurate recitation of the gospel, but no evidence of spiritual conversion. Unfortunately, when a child simply recites the gospel and expresses a fear of

hell, parents want the child to be baptized. This desire is not malicious but is born out of ignorance of true conversion.

When a child is baptized, but is not truly converted, the disparity produces confusion and skepticism in later years. Teenagers return from summer camp and ask to be “re-baptized,” believing they were previously not truly saved. Having heard this story multiple times, the church is hesitant to celebrate conversions in accordance with Luke 15. Far too many times, the church has seen children be baptized at an early age and then be “re-baptized” as teenagers. Later, these same teens express no desire to follow Jesus, be a part of a church, or bear spiritual fruit keeping with repentance. Emotional experiences, separated from a biblical understanding of conversion, are passed off as salvation and later prove insincere. Parents, who still remember the multiple baptisms, are confused as to the spiritual condition of their once baptized, yet now unbelieving, child. Unfortunately, in our area, it is not difficult to find teenagers who care nothing for spiritual things, but because of baptism at an early age, are convinced they are saved.

MBC is a church in the South, and cultural Christianity is still prevalent among adults. Cultural Christianity is the idea that being moral, at any level, is the equivalent of being a Christian or being born again. The common errors of “easy believism” and “carnal Christianity” have led the unconverted to think they are converted. In our member interviews, pastors require prospective members to explain the gospel in one or two sentences, share how they were saved, and describe their baptism. Some people resent being asked to share their testimony, interpreting the pastoral question as an act of suspicion. It is not unusual for people to assume conversion as a basic individual right that is incapable of being examined. Erroneously, if a person claims to be saved, or to have asked Jesus into his heart, then that claim is beyond dispute. Subsequently, baptism is confused with regeneration and salvation. These gifts are then thought to be irrevocable. An unbiblical understanding of conversion inoculates adults against truly

being born again. They were baptized. Surely, they have experienced the new birth.

In addition to unbelief outside of the church, it is common for members of the church to struggle with assurance of their own salvation. Few members know what it is to test themselves to see if they are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5).<sup>1</sup> Instead of sober joy, the Lord's Supper is consumed mechanically and without examining oneself (1 Cor 11:28). It is rare to hear of adult members showing diligence to make their calling and election sure (2 Pet 1:10). Possibly, the church does not have a culture where these conversations can happen normally. However, where the silence is due to disobedience, these acts of disobedience can be explained by a lack of a biblical understanding of conversion. Many members do not know what it is to be born again, but they assume it has happened. In our community, and in the families of our members, we confess that a person must be born again and then baptized, but a biblical theology of conversion is lacking. In some cases, salvation, and not just sound doctrine, is lacking.

### **Rationale**

The factors mentioned above indicate that MBC needed to be taught a proper understanding of conversion prior to baptism. Equipping parents with a biblical theology of the new birth sought two effects in the body. First, a correct doctrine of salvation will help parents examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. This personal knowledge among the adults will help awaken the baptized but unconverted. Second, when parents know how to make their own calling and election sure, they will be capable of helping children make their calling and election sure. Parents, and not pastors, are the primary disciplers of children. Parents, therefore must be equipped to disciple their children.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup>Timothy Paul Jones identifies the failure of churches to train parents as one of the major obstacles keeping parents from discipling their children. Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 100.

Additionally, understanding salvation is a deep and joyful process that often happens over an extended period of time. The evidences of salvation can appear slowly. Equipping parents with a biblical theology of conversion enables them to faithfully lead their children to grow in the Lord and not simply make a decision.

Second, the evidences of salvation can be faked in church gatherings, and the unconverted can make an orthodox confession. So, while the gospel of Jesus Christ is taught clearly in large group settings among MBC, it is necessary to discuss biblical conversion individually. This individual discipleship must occur in the daily milieu of family. Preparing children for baptism sought to take the current large group teaching into the members' homes. A lack of biblical conversion is easier to hide in a large group environment than in a one-to-one discipleship relationship. Therefore, a robust gospel plan to prepare children for baptism equipped parents to faithfully teach their children what it means biblically to be born again.

Third, because preparing one's child for baptism at this in-depth level requires the parent to be spiritually mature, parents needed to be equipped. Parents were discipled, trained, and regularly encouraged to fulfill their individual calling to make disciples of their children.<sup>3</sup> Using this baptism preparation curriculum required the pastors of MBC to fulfill their role of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12) instead of trying to do most of the ministry themselves.

Fourth, preparing for baptism can provide an opportunity, early in the Christian life, to form the habits of a disciple. Instead of having to correct faulty ideas about salvation later in life, children were taught the marks of biblical conversion at an early age. The gospel was emphasized throughout because the gospel that causes salvation is

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<sup>3</sup>Timothy Paul Jones explains the necessity of equipping parents as primary disciple-makers of their children. He writes, "As a result [of long standing neglect of equipping parents], Christian parents need focused guidance ("explicit curriculum") to respond in obedience to God's commands. Timothy Paul Jones, "Equipping the Generations: Developing Family Ministry Curriculum for Your Church," *Journal of Family Ministry* 2, no. 2 (2011): 67.

the same gospel that causes spiritual growth. The Scripture that makes one wise for salvation is the Scripture that directs the life of the saved. The curriculum, and discipleship relationship, focused on individual growth through believing the gospel and understanding the Word. Parents taught their children instead of leaving them to struggle alone. Daily habits of Bible study and meeting for encouragement were integrated throughout the curriculum.

Lastly, teaching a disciple to obey all that Jesus commands starts with being baptized.<sup>4</sup> Done correctly, preparing for this foundational command to be baptized can prove fruitful throughout the Christian life. Utilizing a curriculum that helps a new believer understand conversion and baptism, develop spiritual habits, and seek out the help of more mature believers, positions the candidate for continued growth. The advantage is not for the candidate alone. Equipping parents to make disciples, at the basic level of preparing children for baptism, encourages a culture of discipleship at increasingly difficult levels throughout life. It was necessary to equip parents and children with a biblical understanding of conversion and baptism.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop a baptism preparation curriculum that equips parents and children with a biblical theology of conversion in Mambrino Baptist Church.

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<sup>4</sup>It is common today to separate the command to baptize from the command to teach. Matt 28:19–20, however, does not support this separation. Instead, new believers are to be taught to obey, and this necessarily includes obeying the command to be baptized. Andreas Köstenberger makes the same point when he writes, “Baptism is *an essential part of Christian discipleship*. This is clear from the Matthean ‘Great Commission’ passage, where disciple-making is said to consist of baptizing converts and of teaching them to obey the commands of Jesus” (emphasis his). Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Baptism in the Gospels,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), 33.

## **Goals**

The overarching goal of this project was to establish parents and children in the Christian faith. Preparing disciples for baptism was an opportunity to discern if the new birth has actually happened.

1. The first goal of this project was to develop a baptismal curriculum which will aid parents and children in their understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism.
2. The second goal of this project was to increase parents' biblical understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism and increase parents' confidence in preparing their children for baptism.
3. The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of the gospel, conversion, and baptism among baptismal candidates through parental discipleship.

The following section on research methodology will explain in detail how the project attempted to realize each of the above goals.

## **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to develop a biblically faithful and age appropriate curriculum to be used to help parents and children test themselves to see if they are in the faith.<sup>5</sup> This curriculum was used to help discern the child's readiness for baptism. A first draft of the curriculum existed previously, but it stood in need of revision and improvement. This goal was measured by an expert panel of pastor-theologians who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>6</sup> The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The second goal of this project was to increase parents' biblical understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism and increase parents' confidence in preparing their

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<sup>5</sup>All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project. The baptism preparation curriculum is included as appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup>The curriculum evaluation rubrics are included in appendix 2.

children for baptism. I equipped the parents by working through the curriculum prior to their work at home with their children. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey that measured the parents' level of knowledge and confidence to prepare their children to understand the gospel, conversion, and baptism.<sup>7</sup> Emphasis was placed on the parents' ability to define and identify their children's growth in the gospel, conversion, baptism, and subsequent growth. The survey was given to parents to determine their current level of knowledge and confidence before working through the curriculum with a mentor. Once the curriculum is completed with a mentor, the survey was given again. This goal was considered successfully met when t-test dependent samples demonstrate a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post survey scores among parents. Deficiencies which persist after the second survey were addressed on a personal basis.

The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of the gospel, conversion, and baptism among baptismal candidates through parental discipleship. This goal was measured by interviewing the children before the curriculum was started and after it was completed. As a part of this project, a list of open-ended questions was created, utilized, and later improved with input from parents.<sup>8</sup> I conducted the interview with the parents and child using the provided questions to evaluate the readiness of the child for baptism. As with the parents, emphasis was placed on personal dependence upon Christ, a biblical knowledge of conversion, a personal awareness of the evidence of conversion, and a desire for biblical baptism. This goal was considered successfully met when the interviews have been analyzed yielding an accurate appraisal of the spiritual condition of, and the next appropriate step for, the child seeking baptism. Children who demonstrated a sufficient knowledge of the gospel and experience of conversion were

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<sup>7</sup>The parent survey is included in appendix 3.

<sup>8</sup>The list of questions is included in appendix 4.



scheduled for baptism. Some children needed additional time and teaching to appropriate the gospel and give evidence of conversion before seeking baptism. These children were told to wait for baptism and were given instruction for continued discipleship with their parents.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

*One-to-One Discipleship.* One-to-One Discipleship is the relationship and process through which a Christian seeks the conversion and Christ-like growth of another person.<sup>9</sup>

*Conversion.* Conversion is the transformation of a spiritually dead soul into a regenerate soul by the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

*The Gospel.* The Gospel is the good news that the righteous life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ is the means by which the Holy Spirit regenerates sinners and reconciles them to God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Bill Hull defines discipleship as “when someone answers the call to learn from Jesus and others how to live his or her life as though Jesus were living it. Bill Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship: You Can’t Have One without the Other* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 20. Michael Wilkins writes, “Discipling implies the responsibility of disciples helping one another to grow as disciples.” Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 27.

<sup>10</sup>J. I. Packer writes, “Theologically, conversion means committing oneself to that union with Christ which baptism symbolizes: union with him in death, which brings freedom from the penalty and dominion of sin, and union with him in resurrection from death, to live to God through him and walk with him in newness of life through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christian conversion is commitment to Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Saviour, and this commitment means reckoning union with Christ to be a fact and living accordingly.” J. I. Packer, “Conversion,” in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I. H. Marshal et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 223.

<sup>11</sup>Mounce observes, “The gospel is the joyous proclamation of God’s redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of man enslaved to sin. . . . In briefest outline, this message contained: (1) A historical proclamation of the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, set forth as the fulfilment of prophecy and involving man’s responsibility; (2) A theological evaluation of the person of Jesus as both Lord and Christ; (3) A summons to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins. . . . The gospel is power (Rom 1:16). As an instrument of the Holy Spirit it convicts (1 Thess. 1:5) and converts (Col. 1:6).” Robert Mounce, “Gospel,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 255.

*Baptism.* Baptism is the biblical means through which the converted or regenerate identify with the crucified, buried, and raised Jesus by being immersed under water.<sup>12</sup>

Three limitations applied to this project. First, determining the spiritual readiness of a child for baptism involves mystery. In order to prevent personal bias, the pastors of MBC worked together with one another and with the child's parents to ensure a fair and careful pastoral interview. Second, the accuracy of the pre- and post-series surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the parents to be honest about their current desire to prepare their children for baptism. To mitigate this limitation, the respondents were promised that their answers would remain anonymous. Third, the effectiveness of the curriculum was limited by the motivation of the children and parents. If either the child or parent did not want to invest time, energy, and heart into the discipleship relationship, it was difficult to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum. To mitigate this limitation, each participant was interviewed prior to starting the curriculum.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project addressed preparing children for baptism in a Southern Baptist Church. Various modes of baptism were not discussed. Second, children and not adults were the intended audience of the curriculum. The nature of the curriculum required it to be age appropriate in its content and illustrations. Finally, the project was confined to a 15 week timeframe. This gave adequate time to revise the curriculum, conduct interviews, equip parents, prepare children for baptism, and conduct the post-series survey after sessions were completed. The time frame will not allow, however, to determine if the child will persevere to the end.

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<sup>12</sup>Dever observes, "The Christian church is commanded to practice baptism by immersing in water a person who both professes and evidences conversion" Mark Dever, "The Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 617.

## Conclusion

This project sought to equip parents and children of Mambrino Baptist Church with a biblical understanding of conversion prior to the child's baptism. While baptism is inseparable from conversion, it is not a mindless act of obedience. Baptism is a profession of faith.<sup>13</sup> Preparing for baptism is not simply a matter of mechanics. Children were tested for readiness and, where appropriate, prepared for baptism. Preparation included understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ, conversion, and the meaning of baptism. Testing involved the ability to give a credible confession of faith. This project attempted to use the basics of Bible study and discipleship relationships to prepare children to test themselves to see if they are in the faith.

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<sup>13</sup>Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 43.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GOSPEL, CONVERSION, AND BAPTISM

The purpose of this project is to develop a biblical curriculum for parents and pastors to use when considering the fitness of children for baptism. On one hand, the goal is to teach children a biblical understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism. On the other hand, the goal is to encourage a discipleship relationship through which parents and pastors can more clearly discern the spiritual condition of a child seeking baptism. This chapter will provide the exegetical foundation for the curriculum. The first section is devoted to exegeting 1 Corinthians 15:1–8 in order to clearly articulate the gospel. Once the gospel is clear it is crucial to establish a biblical theology of conversion from John 3:1–8. The next section will examine Romans 6:1–4 for the purpose of defining baptism. Two shorter excursions into Matthew 28:19 and Acts 8:26–38 will follow in order to deduce their implications for baptism. Finally, a word concerning household baptisms will complete the chapter. Read together, these sections will provide the content for the curriculum and demonstrate the need for its use.

#### **1 Corinthians 15:1–8**

What a person believes and how a person believes are two essential components of salvation. When preparing a person for baptism, it is essential to define the gospel, explain biblical faith, and give instruction for how to stand firm in the gospel. Delineating biblical faith is necessary because fervent and personal faith in a lie will not save anyone. Additionally, it is possible to have an accurate knowledge of the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ but not trust Christ and thereby not be saved. David Garland summarizes Paul’s warnings: “If they do not have faith that holds out, they believed in

vain [and] if they have faith in something that is untrue, they believed in vain.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it is crucial to define what is involved in saving faith. This section will defend the claim that there is no salvation apart from personally entrusting oneself to Christ, who was crucified for sins and raised bodily from the grave. In 1 Corinthians 15:1–8, the apostle Paul explains the necessary elements of the gospel, exhorts the people to continue believing the gospel, and warns the church about believing in vain. The content of the gospel will be discussed first (1 Cor 15:3–8). Next, verses 1 and 2 will be studied illustrating how a person must hear the gospel, believe the gospel, and continue in the gospel to be saved. In order to be saved, what a person believes and how a person believes must be defined biblically.

First Corinthians 15:3–8 describes the content of the gospel as the death of Christ for sins, the burial of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ verified by over 500 hundred people. These are matters of “first importance” (1 Cor 15:3). Anthony Thiselton understands verses 3 through 5 to “constitute, in effect, an early creed which declares the absolute fundamentals of Christian faith and on which Christian identity (and the experience of salvation) is built.”<sup>2</sup> For persons to appropriate the gospel, there must be biblical clarity concerning the gospel. The essential elements of the gospel are the death of Christ for our sins, the burial of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the appearance of the resurrected Christ to over five hundred witnesses. An understanding of the crucifixion of Christ for one’s sins and Christ’s later verified resurrection from the grave are necessary elements for saving faith. Romans 3:25 and 10:9 give corroborating evidence for the claim that personal faith in Christ crucified for sins and raised from the grave are necessary components for salvation.

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<sup>1</sup>David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 683.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistles to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 1186.

The death of Christ is a matter of first importance because his death is for sin. The propitiatory work of Christ is an ancient promise: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” First Corinthians 15:3 demolishes the idea that the crucifixion is merely an example of love to be repeated in the sacrificial generosity of Christ’s disciples. Instead of exemplification, the cross of Christ is an act of propitiation. Gordon Fee summarizes this point well, “That ‘Christ died for our sins’ is the primary tenet of the Christian faith.”<sup>3</sup> Biblical preaching of the gospel will make Christ’s substitutionary and sacrificial work clear. C. K. Barrett connects the work of Christ concerning sins to the believer’s need, “the death of Jesus was intended to deal with sin, which (it is clearly implied) is the predicament from which man needs to be delivered.”<sup>4</sup> The fundamental problem every person faces in life is the problem of personal sin before a holy God. Jesus’ death for sins atones for those sins and thus is the means of restoration to God.

The following Scriptures promised that Christ would die for sins. It is common, but not without dispute, for theologians to refer to Psalms 8:4–8; 16:9–10; and 110:1–4, as well as Isaiah 52:13–53:12.<sup>5</sup> Gordon Fee recognizes a reference to “the larger reality of the OT” and specifically to the Passover Lamb, the exodus, and the Day of Atonement.<sup>6</sup> In similar fashion, David Garland points away from a specific Old Testament passage and asserts, “The phrase ‘according to the Scriptures’ . . . affirms in shorthand that Christ’s death was ‘according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God’ (Acts 2:23).”<sup>7</sup> The death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus are the

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<sup>3</sup>Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2014), 723.

<sup>4</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 340.

<sup>5</sup>Roy E. Ciampra and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 747.

<sup>6</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 725.

<sup>7</sup>Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 685.

culmination of God's saving activity. All of history and all of Scripture hinge on the death of Christ for sins.

The burial of Christ is a matter of first importance because burial removes all doubt of an actual death. Ciampra and Rosner agree, "the statement that Christ was buried serves to reinforce the fact that he died."<sup>8</sup> The reference to the burial of Jesus also functions as a connection between his death and resurrection. Robertson and Plummer point to the inclusion of the burial of Jesus in all four Gospels along with 1 Corinthians 15 because "the burial was evidence of a bodily resurrection."<sup>9</sup> The gospel includes the physical death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as the means of reconciling sinners to God.

The resurrection of Christ on the third day is another matter of first importance. Garland reiterates the importance of the resurrection of Christ by reminding the readers that "The resurrection of Jesus formed an essential part of every known kind of Christian preaching."<sup>10</sup> There can be no accurate preaching of the gospel without reference to the resurrection of Jesus. First Corinthians 15 is devoted to a right understanding of the resurrection of Jesus to the believer's life. The importance of Christ's resurrection "is not something that belongs to the past, but something that has an effect on present reality."<sup>11</sup> First Peter 1:3 testifies to the importance of the resurrection, "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are inseparable elements of the gospel message.

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<sup>8</sup>Ciampra and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 748.

<sup>9</sup>Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1953), 334.

<sup>10</sup>Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 686.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

The appearance of Christ to the apostles and over 500 people is a matter of “first importance” because the eye-witnesses validate the claim that Jesus was raised. Paul’s reference to the witness serves to validate the gospel. Garland agrees: “As Christ’s burial follows his death and confirms its reality, the account of his appearances to others after death confirms the reality of resurrection.”<sup>12</sup> The gospel is the good news that all those who believe in Jesus receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God because of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.

The apostle Paul is careful to state that his gospel is the ancient and promised gospel. He is not preaching a new gospel but only that which is “in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). It was always God’s plan to accomplish the salvation of Jews and Gentiles through the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Garland points to Acts 2:23, “Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,” as further evidence that Jesus’ death was according to plan.<sup>13</sup> The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only and promised means of redemption.

Next, it is important to understand what 1 Corinthians 15:1–2 requires concerning faith in the gospel. First, the Corinthians needed to be reminded of the gospel. They needed to return to and hold fast to the gospel. Thiselton explains, “Here Paul envisages the possibility of such a superficial or confused appropriation of the gospel in which no coherent grasp of its logical or practical entailments for eschatology or for practical discipleship had been reached.”<sup>14</sup> Paul alerts the church to the danger of people believing the gospel without due consideration or in a haphazard manner.<sup>15</sup> Believing the gospel entails working out the implications of the gospel in relation to personal sin, daily

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<sup>12</sup>Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 687.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 685.

<sup>14</sup>Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1186.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.



living, and the future resurrection of the dead. Hearing the gospel and learning to appropriate the gospel are both meant to occur in the context of the church and discipleship relationships. Jesus authoritatively connects making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20). Preparing disciples for baptism provides a fruitful opportunity to encourage biblical faith.

After God’s work to accomplish salvation through Christ, the first step toward the application of that salvation occurs when the gospel is preached to a sinner. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the gospel they must believe is the gospel he preached to them. First Corinthians 15:3-5, 12 specify the content of the gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These verses testify against the idea that the gospel is a way of life. The gospel is a message which must be proclaimed, received, and held onto for it to have its effect. In addition, the gospel is delivered through words. Thiselton identifies the proclamation of the gospel “as announcing states of affairs, especially acts of God.”<sup>16</sup> Paul, in Romans 10:14, substantiates the claim that salvation requires the gospel being preached, heard, and believed.

It is helpful here to combine the elements of receiving and believing the gospel. The Corinthians had heard and received, and they were standing in the gospel. They were being saved by the gospel. Ciampra and Rosner explain, “The four points seem to progress in chronological order, starting from their first experience with the gospel and moving to the process of salvation which they are presently experiencing and which God would bring to completion at the end.”<sup>17</sup> Hearing, believing, holding fast to, and being saved by the gospel are all tied specifically to the Christian’s belief in Christ’s atoning work. Believing the gospel and receiving Jesus are synonymous actions. In 1 Corinthians 15:1, a hearer must receive and hold onto the message of Christ’s death,

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<sup>16</sup>Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1184.

<sup>17</sup>Ciampra and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 743.

burial, and resurrection to be saved. According to John 1:12, the right to become a child of God depends upon believing in Jesus, which is equivalent to receiving him. Salvation is not the product of a haphazard or cursory agreement with facts about the Son of God or the resurrection. First Corinthians 15:1–8 insists that future salvation is the product of personal and abiding faith in Christ crucified for sins whose resurrection is the forerunner and promise of the resurrection to come. The gospel, therefore, must be the focus of discipleship, especially when preparing for baptism.

### **John 3:1–8**

Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John 3 establishes the necessity of conversion prior to entering the kingdom of God. Verses one through eight will be exegeted and then applied to believer's baptism proving it is necessary for a person to be converted, or born again, prior to baptism. Due to the space restrictions of this chapter, discussion will be limited to the credobaptist understanding of baptism.

In John 3:3, Jesus insists that a person must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. Regarding Nicodemus, it is crucial to note that being a member of the old covenant people of God is not the same as being converted. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, yet he must be born again. Being born again is, therefore, more than and not equivalent to being a member of the old covenant. In 3:2, Nicodemus confesses that the power at work in Jesus comes from God. Yet, even this awareness of the power of Jesus is not the same as conversion. Conversion is more than a personal respect for the person or power of Jesus Christ. An internal or spiritual change must occur for a person to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus sees something in Jesus, but he does not comprehend, with saving faith, the fullness of Jesus Christ. Carson compares the two positions: "Nicodemus claims he can 'see' something of who Jesus is in the miracles; Jesus insists no-one can 'see' the saving reign of God at all, including the miraculous

signs, unless born again.”<sup>18</sup> The necessity of the new birth implies the dilemma of those prior to conversion. Prior to being born again, a person is in a state of inability, unable to understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14). Before the Spirit sovereignly causes regeneration, people are blind (2 Cor 4:4), weak (Rom 5:6), and even dead (Eph 2:1, 5; Rom 8:7). Seeing the kingdom of God requires conversion. A person must be born of the Spirit; the flesh is no help at all (John 6:63).

For anyone to see the kingdom of God, the eschatological equivalent to being saved, that person must be born from above. Commenting on John 3, Andreas Köstenberger makes the connection explicit between the kingdom of God and salvation, “That the expressions ‘kingdom of God’ and ‘eternal life’ are essentially equivalent is suggested by their parallel use in Matt. 19:16, 24.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus is correcting Nicodemus’ understanding of himself and the kingdom. Carson explains, “To a Jew with the background and convictions of Nicodemus, ‘to see the kingdom of God’ was to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life.”<sup>20</sup> It was assumed that a law-abiding Jew will necessarily inherit the kingdom. This kingdom, however, must not be relegated to the age to come but is in fact already present in Jesus. Nicodemus, therefore, is being pressed to consider what he is actually seeing. Does he see the kingdom of God in Jesus? Does Nicodemus understand his fundamental need of transformation before entering the kingdom? Like the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22–26), Nicodemus only initially sees shadows and shapes. Nicodemus sees a powerful miracle worker; he does not see the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. It is the

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<sup>18</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 188.

<sup>19</sup>Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 2004), 123.

<sup>20</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 188.

work of God in a person which enables a person to see and confess Jesus rightly (Mark 8:27–30; Matt 16:16–17).

John 3:3–8 emphasizes the concept of being born. The word occurs 8 times in 6 verses. Nicodemus considers the possibility of a second physical birth while Jesus requires a new spiritual birth. Jesus is making Nicodemus aware of his need to be spiritually transformed. Köstenberger rightly asserts that being born again, or born from above, refers to “a new beginning and a decisive inner transformation of a person’s life [which] is found in other OT passages (e.g., Jer 31:33–34; Ezek 11:19–20).”<sup>21</sup> Beasley-Murray agrees; he explains being born again as being born from above, born from God, or made new by God (John 3:31; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 1:23; Titus 3:5).<sup>22</sup> Morris maintains that “John frequently speaks of eternal life, and for him the possession of eternal life appears to mean very much the same as entering the kingdom of God as the Synoptists picture it.”<sup>23</sup> Being born again is, therefore, the radical transformation of a sinner from the condition of spiritually dead to spiritually alive. When the requirement for the new birth in John 3:1–8 is compared with the statements of inability found in 1 Corinthians 2:12–16 and Romans 8:5–8, what Jesus requires is the Spirit-given ability to understand, believe, and live in step with the gospel. Through the new birth, the giving of status (John 1:12–13) and the giving of power enable the believer to see, understand, and enter the kingdom both now and in the age to come. Biblical evangelism and discipleship must teach the biblical truth and practical implications of humanity’s inability and the enabling power of the Spirit.

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<sup>21</sup>Andreas Köstenberger, “John,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 435.

<sup>22</sup>George Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 45–48.

<sup>23</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 190.

In John 3:4–5, Jesus seeks to correct Nicodemus’ understanding of the need for conversion. After noting the expectation that faithful Jews would necessarily be included in the kingdom, Köstenberger notes, “It is all the more remarkable that Jesus’ stipulation that those who would enter God’s kingdom must be ‘born of water and the spirit’ excludes Nicodemus and his fellow Sanhedrin members.”<sup>24</sup> Even law-keeping Jews must be born of water and spirit. Köstenberger understands “water and spirit” to be “an allusion to Ezek. 36:25–27, which presages God’s cleansing of human hearts with water and their inner transformation by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>25</sup> Beasley-Murray interprets water and spirit as a reference to baptism and the Holy Spirit by contending that “all stand in need of God’s forgiveness and the recreating work of the Holy Spirit, which is as imminent as the kingdom itself.”<sup>26</sup> While baptism is surely connected with conversion later (see Matt 28:18–20), it appears to be a be an anachronism to see water baptism here. Much more likely, seeing that Nicodemus should have readily understood Jesus’ words, is Köstenberger’s position that water and spirit is a reference to Ezekiel 36. All persons, Jew and Gentile, require cleansing for sin and the indwelling of the Spirit which enables faith. The forgiveness of sin comes through faith in Jesus Christ, the one who died for sin, was buried, and was raised. Disciples demonstrate the reception of the Spirit and the cleansing of sin through faith in Christ by being baptized.

In John 3:7–8, Jesus explains that the new birth is the product of the Spirit’s work. Every person who is born again and enters the kingdom does so because of the sovereign Spirit. A complementary passage is John 6:63. There, Jesus reinforces his claim

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<sup>24</sup>Köstenberger, “John,” 434.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. D. A. Carson agrees: “Most important of all is Ezekiel 36:25–27, where water and spirit come together so forcefully, the first to signify cleaning from impurity, and the second to depict the transformation of hearts that will enable people to follow God wholly.” Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 195.

<sup>26</sup>Beasley-Murray, *John*, 48.

that he alone gives life. When the disciples struggle to believe this hard word, Jesus explains their difficulty with the necessary work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is no help at all. A person must be born from above in order to understand and accept the life-giving role of Jesus.

Nicodemus initially understands the new birth as a second physical birth (John 3:4). Jesus corrects this error by asserting the necessity of being born of water and Spirit (John 3:5). Jesus clarifies the dichotomy between the physical and spiritual, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Carson, after affirming the inability of the natural man, asserts that “only the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”<sup>27</sup> The new birth, or regeneration, is a requirement for salvation which man is incapable of securing for himself. In order to see the kingdom, enter the kingdom, and by inference be baptized, a person must be born again.

Jesus uses the wind and its effects to explain the Spirit and his effects. Just as the wind sovereignly moves without the input of man, so also the Spirit sovereignly moves without seeking the permission of man. Ridderbos repeats the emphasis on God’s power over humanity in the new birth when he states, “The alternatives [of flesh and Spirit] rather concern humankind in its (fleshly) powerlessness over against the sovereignty and omnipotence of God (the Spirit), who alone can transform humankind, that is, grant us the needed rebirth from above.”<sup>28</sup> Readers should not, however, assume that the Spirit’s sovereign work of granting the new birth occurs undetected. The observable effect of the Spirit is personal belief in the crucified Son of Man for eternal life. Jesus tells Nicodemus whoever believes in the Son of Man has eternal life (John 3:15). Ridderbos connects the sovereign work of God with faith stating, “To be able to

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<sup>27</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 196.

<sup>28</sup>Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 131.

see and to believe in the heavenly-descended, cross-exalted Son of man—that takes a different set of eyes, and for that one must be born from above.”<sup>29</sup> The effects of the Spirit in granting the new birth are observed in personal faith in Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sin and inheritance of eternal life.

It is now possible to present the claim that conversion is a prerequisite for baptism. This claim will be defended in detail below through the exegesis of Romans 6:1–4. Assuming the correct exegesis of Romans 6, since baptism marks a believer’s salvation or entrance into the kingdom, it is correct to require conversion or the new birth prior to baptism. A person must be born again in order to see or enter the kingdom of God. This new birth is the Spirit’s work and is evidenced in personal belief in the crucified Son of man. Baptism is the culmination of a believer’s union with Christ by the power of the Spirit through faith in the gospel.

The account of Jesus talking with Nicodemus is particularly helpful for pastors talking with children about conversion. Carson summarizes the progression of faith in Nicodemus when he writes, “The most natural reading of 3:1–15 is that at this point Nicodemus, though interested, is not particularly open to the truth . . . yet eventually he comes around to side with Jesus (7:45–52) and ultimately to take his place at Calvary (19:38–42).”<sup>30</sup> Pastors and parents will do well to help children carefully distinguish between knowing facts about Jesus, like Nicodemus of John 3:2, and being born again, such that the child is assured entrance into the kingdom of God, like those born again in John 3:3. Pastors and parents must carefully teach and help discern the Spirit’s work in conversion prior to baptism.

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<sup>29</sup>Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 137.

<sup>30</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 186.

## Romans 6:1–4

The believer's union with Christ is the product of the new birth, repentance, and faith which lead necessarily to baptism. Jamieson asserts, "Becoming a Christian in a comprehensive, biblical sense involves the public act of baptism."<sup>31</sup> Support for this claim is found in the way the New Testament connects the various aspects of salvation with baptism. Jamieson draws upon Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:25–27; Colossians 2:11–12; and 1 Peter 3:21 to explain the connection between the various aspects of conversion. From these passages he reasons that baptism is inseparable from conversion and baptism often functions as a synecdoche for conversion.<sup>32</sup> The same argument for baptism as a synecdoche for salvation is made by Robert Stein from Luke and Acts. Based on those conversion and baptism accounts Stein concludes, "Repentance, faith, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Spirit are integrally related components in the conversion-initiatory rite of water baptism."<sup>33</sup> Jamieson and Stein are not alone in their understanding of baptism and salvation. In his book *The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, Fred Malone explains the connection between conversion and baptism. Regeneration, or being born again, is the seal of new covenant membership and baptism is the sign.<sup>34</sup> While baptism is not identical to conversion, baptism is inseparable from conversion.

This section on baptism will intentionally build on the previous section from John 3 and the new birth. An exegesis of Romans 6:1–4 will support the thesis that water

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<sup>31</sup>Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 41.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 41–44.

<sup>33</sup>Robert H. Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 41.

<sup>34</sup>Malone asserts, "The seal of regeneration, exhibited outwardly by a confession of faith, is the true New Testament fulfillment, antitype and replacement of the Old Testament circumcision. Baptism then is the sign, not seal, of regeneration. Regeneration itself, the circumcision of the heart, is the seal of the New Covenant. This is why water baptism should be applied only to those who confess faith in Christ as an outward evidence of that New Covenant regeneration, as the New Testament institutes and prescribes." Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Versus Paedobaptism* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2007), 116.



baptism is a demonstration of one's union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection by faith unto a righteous life. Of first importance is establishing the proposition that Romans 6:1–4 includes water baptism. It is generally accepted that Romans 6:1–4 refers to spiritual union with Christ. The contention is if baptism by immersion is a necessary part of the Apostle Paul's argument in Romans 6. Concerning the various positions, Douglas Moo writes,

To be sure, a few scholars have denied any reference to water baptism here, arguing that 'baptize' means 'immerse' in a metaphorical sense, or that Paul refers to 'baptism in the Spirit,' or that he uses 'baptize' as a metaphor for incorporation into the body of Christ. But, without discounting the possibility of allusions to one or more of these ideas, a reference to water baptism is primary. By the date of Romans, 'baptize' had become almost a technical expression for the rite of Christian initiation by water, and this is surely the meaning the Roman Christians would have given the word.<sup>35</sup>

Moo asserts that by the time the apostle Paul wrote Romans, the word 'baptize' had taken on the meaning of initiation into Christianity through water. Robert Stein furthers the argument by demonstrating the connection between faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Testament and first-century churches.<sup>36</sup> The early church understood and upheld the interdependence between the various components of beginning the Christian life. It is therefore justifiable to understand baptism in Romans 6:1–4 to include baptism in water.

Romans 6 begins with a question regarding the plausibility of a Christian continuing in sin. Christians who have been baptized are certainly the topic of chapter six for multiple reasons. First, the preceding chapters have explained the necessity of faith for a person to be transferred from "in Adam" to "in Christ." When a person is transferred

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<sup>35</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 359.

<sup>36</sup>Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," 35–61. In another article Stein writes, "In the mind of a first-century Christian, these five components were inextricably linked in conversion, just as they were for the New Testament writers. There was no separation or exclusion of any of the elements." Robert H. Stein, "Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (1998): 12.

from the realm of Adam to freedom in Christ grace reigns and justification is enjoyed (Rom 4:23–25; 5:17–21). Romans 6 is addressing believers who have been united to Christ and justified by faith. This connection between the chapters also strengthens the claim that chapter six includes water baptism. Second, Romans 6:1 does not ask how can an unbeliever be joined to Christ and then answer that the unbeliever must have faith and be baptized. Instead, Romans 6:1 asks if it is possible for the believer, joined to Christ, to continue in sin. The answer to the possibility of remaining in sin is not for the believer to reunite with Christ spiritually, but to remember all that it means to have been united to Christ previously through baptism. Baptism is more than a simple memorial of conversion.<sup>37</sup> Baptism is the culmination of the new birth, repentance, and faith.<sup>38</sup> The entire argument of Romans 6 depends on the person in question having already experienced justification by faith and union with Christ through baptism.

The exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:1–5 proves the necessity of personal faith in Christ crucified for sin, buried, and raised on the third day. The exegesis of John 3:1–8 demonstrates the necessity of the Spirit’s work of regeneration in order for a person to be saved. The exegesis of Romans 6:1–4 will now illustrate how baptism in water is the culmination of the new birth, repentance, and faith.

It is inconceivable for a Christian to remain in sin because every Christian died to sin at conversion. Before exploring how a person dies to sin, it is crucial to understand what it means to die to sin. A brief summary of the chapter explains that death to sin means the ruling power of sin has been broken in the believer’s life. According to Romans 6:6, the believer was crucified with Christ in order to attain freedom from

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<sup>37</sup>Colin Kruse calls baptism “a shorthand way of referring to the whole conversion experience.” Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 260.

<sup>38</sup>Baptism is a culmination in the sense that through baptism a Christian necessarily and publicly professes his/her already present salvation through faith in Christ crucified and raised. See the discussion on page 29 and following.

slavery to sin. Christians are to “consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11). The reign of sin has been severed and sin will not have dominion over those under grace (6:12, 14). Emancipation from slavery to sin is the theme throughout the chapter (6:17, 18, 19, 20, 22). Moo summarizes why it is impossible for the converted to continue in sin: “Living a life pleasing to God flows from the real experience of liberation from sin’s domain secured by God for us in Christ.”<sup>39</sup> By faith, through baptism into Christ, the tyranny of sin is severed through union with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. The one united to Christ cannot continue as a slave of sin because he has died to sin.

Now it is necessary to investigate how a believer dies to sin. Cranfield summarizes the four main options for “death to sin” as forensic, sacramental, moral, or physical.<sup>40</sup> Schreiner argues for the second, or sacramental sense, for the following reasons.<sup>41</sup> The forensic sense is inadequate because the totality of Romans 6 argues for the defeat of the power of sin in every day living not simply in a legal dimension. The moral sense does not fit the context of this death to sin. The believer is not exhorted to die to sin but to live in agreement with the reality of death having already occurred. The physical explanation of death to sin is also wrong because the chapter points toward the defeat of sin now, in life, not after death. Schreiner rightly purports the sacramental view, “Verses 3–4 explain that we died to sin when we died with Christ in baptism.”<sup>42</sup> Death to sin is release from slavery to sin. This death occurs through union with Christ at baptism.

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<sup>39</sup>Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 359.

<sup>40</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary on the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1975), 299–300.

<sup>41</sup>Schreiner writes, “Union with Christ in his death and burial and his resurrection becomes a reality through baptism, and thus we must examine verses 3–5 carefully in order to understand the relationship between baptism and the believers’ union with Christ.” Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1998), 305.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

Romans 6:3 places baptism into Christ alongside being baptized into his death. To join with Christ is to join in his death for sin. To state the position clearly, the emphasis of Romans 6:1–4 is on an actual and practical union with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection through baptism. Anders Nygren defends this position: “That which baptism symbolizes also actually happens, and precisely through baptism.”<sup>43</sup> Here it is essential to recall Stein’s argument from Luke-Acts and Jamieson’s argument from 1 Peter 3:21, Galatians 3:25–27, and Colossians 2:11–12. Baptism functions as a synecdoche for conversion and does not stand alone apart from the new birth, repentance, and faith. Baptism necessarily includes all these aspects of conversion. Referring to Romans 6:3, Jamieson explains, “Paul says that we were baptized into Christ’s death, buried with him in baptism, we put on Christ in baptism, and we were raised with Christ in baptism . . . all of these statements about baptism refer not to something that happened after we became Christians but speak of precisely what happened to us when we became Christians.”<sup>44</sup> Baptism is a display of a person’s faith and union with Christ. For some, regeneration, faith, and baptism happen almost instantaneously. For others, faith and baptism appear to be separated by extended periods of time. In all cases of true conversion, baptism marks the reality of spiritual union with Christ.

The strongest supports for union with Christ occurring through baptism are the argument of synecdoche and the hermeneutical principle that Scripture must interpret Scripture. Comparing Romans 6:3 to 1 Peter 3:21 produces support for baptism as union with Christ. First Peter 3:21 exclaims that baptism saves, but not the act of baptism alone. The person’s appeal to God for a clear conscience through Jesus Christ is necessary and renders baptism useless if absent. Bruce Ware remarks, “Baptism which expresses an

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<sup>43</sup>Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1944), 233.

<sup>44</sup>Jamieson, *Going Public*, 40.

appeal to God for forgiveness through the death and resurrection of Jesus is salvific.”<sup>45</sup>

What saves in baptism is the person’s faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ expressed in baptism. This act of faith in 1 Peter 3:21 is identical to union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection as explained in Romans 6:3. Biblical baptism must include an explicit awareness of union with Christ through faith. It is this union which provides forgiveness of sin and propels the convert toward a life of holiness.

The implications of baptism for sanctification and discipleship are immense. Preparing a child to be baptized provides the opportunity to teach a biblical understanding of union with Christ. This biblical understanding of union with Christ must be expressed in baptism and form the foundation for increasing holiness in the years that follow baptism. The need for pastors and parents to have a biblical understanding of conversion prior to baptizing a child is now quite obvious. The exegesis of two additional passages will further buttress the claim.

### **Matthew 28:19**

Baptism is a sign given only to disciples. Only those people, and all those people, seeking salvation through union with Christ should be baptized. An exegesis of Matthew 28:19 will support the thesis by showing Jesus commands only converts, and all converts, to be baptized. The truthfulness of this argument depends on the order of Jesus’ words and the meaning of those words.

Jesus uses one main verb and three supporting participles in Matthew 28:19, and their order is essential. Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples. “Make disciples” is the main verb and making a disciple leads necessarily to baptizing and continual teaching. Baptizing and teaching are the supporting participles which follow

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<sup>45</sup>Bruce Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View,” in *Baptism: Three Views*, ed. David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 28.

immediately upon making disciples. Jesus is clear that baptism is not given in hopes of the person one day becoming his follower. No, baptism is the product of becoming a disciple. Andreas Köstenberger supports this exegesis when he writes, “Baptism is an essential part of Christian discipleship. This is clear from the Matthean ‘Great Commission’ passage, where disciple-making is said to consist of baptizing converts and of teaching them to obey the commands of Jesus.”<sup>46</sup> Jesus commands the baptism of disciples. Making disciples means baptizing disciples.

A disciple is a follower of Jesus- a learner united to the resurrected Jesus by faith. Rengstorf explains that in the New Testament, the word disciple “always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as [disciple], and which in its particularity leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power.”<sup>47</sup> The person who should be baptized is the person attached to or seeking union with Christ. To adopt the terminology of John 3:1–8, this union is the product of the Holy Spirit creating a disciple through the new birth. Additionally, a disciple of Jesus is someone who believes the gospel according to 1 Corinthians 15:1–5 and has been united to Christ as described by Romans 6:1–4. Jesus expects his people to baptize those individuals who are united to him by faith, and he commands his disciples to give public evidence of this union through baptism.<sup>48</sup> Jesus requires the baptism of disciples.

Baptism stands as a declaration of union with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus commands disciples to be baptized and all of Jesus’ disciples follow in

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<sup>46</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Baptism in the Gospels,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 33.

<sup>47</sup>K. H. Rengstorf, “μανθάνω, καταμανθάνω, μαθητής, συμμαθητής, μαθήτρια,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 6:441.

<sup>48</sup>Bobby Jamieson writes, “Baptism is where faith goes public (Acts 2:38–41). It is Jesus’ appointed means by which someone nails their colors to the mast as one of his followers. . . . All who claim to believe in Christ are obligated to be baptized (Matt 28:19).” Jamieson, *Going Public*, 53.

his steps, joining him in a death, burial, and resurrection like his (Matt 28:19; Rom 6:1–4). Baptism is, therefore, necessary for all disciples because a disciple is a follower of the crucified and resurrected Jesus. Baptism is required for disciples because a disciple is a person united to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection through faith. Furthermore, Jesus instructs his disciples to baptize disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thus, baptism is an initiating act of allegiance; the one baptized is a member of the new covenant people of God. Bobby Jamieson makes this connection when he argues that “being baptized into God’s ‘name’ is an act of covenantal initiation and identification.”<sup>49</sup> Every disciple claims entrance into the new covenant through baptism, and every disciple identifies with the Triune God through baptism. This truth reintroduces the earlier claim that baptism is the sign of the new covenant. Jesus required all his disciples to be baptized as a sign of their membership in the new covenant people of God. To state the point clearly, to be a member of the new covenant is to be baptized. This new covenant membership and reconciliation with the Father is the product of union with Christ, sealed by the Spirit, and made public in baptism. Baptism is the sign of entrance into the new covenant people of God.<sup>50</sup> There is no biblical category for a new covenant member who has not been baptized.<sup>51</sup> Baptism is therefore required for all followers of Christ.

It is astounding to note how quickly after the resurrection that this baptismal formula, “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” was

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<sup>49</sup>Jamieson, *Going Public*, 68. Fred Malone supports this connection between baptism and entrance into the new covenant people of God: “Not only are all New Covenant members individually regenerate, but Jesus’ teachings about baptism constitutes New Covenant instruction; that is, that baptism of disciples alone upon confession of their faith in Christ alone (John 4:1–2; Matthew 28:19–20).” Malone, *Baptism of Disciples Alone*, 75.

<sup>50</sup>Stephen Wellum writes, “Because the church, by its very nature, is a regenerate community, the covenant sign of baptism must only be applied to those who have come to faith in Christ.” Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 138.

<sup>51</sup>Stein, “Baptism and Becoming a Christian,” 7.

instituted. Craig Blomberg is correct to see in Matthew 28:19 an early baptismal formula similar to that of Acts 2:38.<sup>52</sup> Since the giving of the Great Commission, baptism in water has stood as a public confession of union with Christ, forgiveness of sins, and entrance into the new covenant people of God. Jesus expected, required, and commanded all his disciples, starting with baptism, to proclaim their allegiance to him, display their union with him, and persevere in following him. Pastors and parents will do well to teach disciples how to obey Jesus' command to be baptized.

### **Acts 8:26–38**

The church should only baptize those who have faith. An exegesis of Acts 8:26–38 will support the thesis by showing that the Ethiopian eunuch was known to be a believer prior to baptism. A brief overview of the household baptisms of Acts will also solidify the position of the baptism of disciples alone. Regarding Acts 8, Philip was sent by the Spirit to intercept the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading from Isaiah 53. After a brief interchange of questions, “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). John Polhill recounts the situation, “Philip had shared the gospel with the Ethiopian treasurer and had surely ended on a note of invitation and commitment.”<sup>53</sup> The Ethiopian was evangelized prior to baptism. From Isaiah 53 it would be natural to explain Jesus' death for sins, his burial, his resurrection, and his subsequent appearances to over 500 people (1 Cor 15:1–5). Philip's preaching necessarily included the call to be baptized, and the Ethiopian sought baptism. It is interesting that the Ethiopian did not respond by demanding baptism but by bringing up the issue of his fitness for baptism. In verse 36 he asks, “What prevents me from being baptized?” F. F. Bruce summarizes Philip's response, “There was nothing to

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<sup>52</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 432.

<sup>53</sup>John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 225.



prevent it, so the chariot was halted, they both went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.”<sup>54</sup> Prior to baptism, Philip determined the Ethiopian met the biblical requirements for baptism.

The exclusion of Acts 8:37 by some translators makes an important point for this paper and the baptism of only believers. John Polhill, while affirming the extrabiblical nature of the verse, also extols its usefulness. Concerning Acts 8:37, Polhill writes, “It seems to embody a very early Christian baptismal confession where the one baptizing asked the candidate if he believed in Christ with all his heart, to which the candidate would respond by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God.”<sup>55</sup> Alongside a necessary confession of Jesus as Lord could be added the pastoral wisdom of testing the candidate’s fitness for baptism. The Ethiopian’s question would be a helpful conversation starter between children seeking baptism and their parents and pastors. Children should ask, “What prevents me from being baptized?” Parents and pastors should give a biblical and accurate response. Building on Acts 8, the requirement for baptism could be summarized as faith as fitness. A child’s desire to be baptized does not necessarily obligate the church to baptize. Spiritual leaders, especially pastors, should follow Philip’s example of discerning the spiritual fitness of all those seeking baptism.

The frontier baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch should not be read as a support for private baptisms disconnected from the church. Drawing on baptism in Luke and Acts, Robert Stein pushes baptisms into the church by claiming, “Along with God’s prevenient work of conviction and his sovereign giving of his Spirit, the church is also intimately involved in the process of one’s becoming a Christian in Acts because it

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<sup>54</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 178.

<sup>55</sup>Polhill, *Acts*, 226.

baptizes the believer.”<sup>56</sup> Philip did not baptize the Ethiopian on his own authority but on the authority of the church. The assumption is, had there been a church in existence, they would have been there attesting to the fitness of the Ethiopian for baptism. Like Stein, Bobby Jamieson makes much of the ecclesial shape of baptism. Jamieson believes that “the church has authority to represent the kingdom of heaven on earth by marking off kingdom citizens, and it derives this authority from Jesus’ grant of the keys of the kingdom.”<sup>57</sup> While church discipline is outside the scope of this paper, the authority of the church to bind members through baptism is not.

Throughout the book of Acts and the New Testament, baptism is given as a sign of entrance into the new covenant people of God and the church is the local gathering of these new covenant members.<sup>58</sup> Their gathering, however, is not informal. The church gathers together and marks out members of the new covenant community through baptism. By baptizing a disciple into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the church is testifying to the person’s belief in the gospel, new birth by the Spirit, and union with Christ. Throughout the book of Acts, apostles with Jesus’ authority are baptizing converts and thereby starting churches who will continue to do the same. Jamieson draws on the metaphors of a passport and citizenship when he announces that “the initial and initiating means by which the church enacts its institutional charter and exercises the keys of the kingdom is baptism.”<sup>59</sup> The church, led by its pastors, needs to exercise its God-given authority to test people’s confession and affirm through baptism the confession of disciples alone.

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<sup>56</sup>Stein, “Baptism in Luke–Acts,” 55.

<sup>57</sup>Jamieson, *Going Public*, 82.

<sup>58</sup>Stephen Wellum writes, “By God’s grace and power we are then transferred from being ‘in Adam’ to being ‘in Christ’ with all the benefits of that union. And the NT is clear: to be ‘in Christ’ and thus in the new covenant, a member of his gathered people (church), means that one is a regenerate believer.” Wellum, “Relationship between the Covenants,” 149.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

A common objection to this position is raised by claiming unbelieving children or infants were baptized during the household baptisms in the book of Acts. It is true that the households of Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor, and Crispus all receive baptism.<sup>60</sup> It does not necessarily follow, however, that unbelieving children were baptized. Regarding Cornelius's house, it is difficult to find any reference to unbelieving children. Robert Stein recounts the characteristics of those who were baptized when he explains, "It should be noted that the 'them' who are baptized in 10:48 and 11:17 are described as: having heard the word (10:44); having received the Holy Spirit (10:46) as at Pentecost (11:15); as believers (implied in 11:17) and having repented (11:18)."<sup>61</sup> The baptism of Cornelius's household refutes infant baptism and gives support to the argument that believers, and no others, should be baptized. Concerning the Philippian jailor, the gospel preached to the household included the command to believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation (16:31). Paul and Silas spoke the word to all in the household (16:32), all the household was baptized (16:33), and rejoiced (16:34). It is difficult to conclude that unbelieving infants heard the word, were baptized, and rejoiced. The more tenable position is that the jailor's house was made up of all ages who heard the gospel and responded with faith and baptism. The account of Crispus also bolsters the position of this paper because Acts 18:8 states, "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household." Therefore, Crispus's household was made up of believers. There is no hint of a mixed household of believers and unbelievers. His entire household believed with him. Surely it is right for believers to be baptized whatever their age. Finally, it must be noted that describing the baptism of a household is not the same as describing the baptism of unbelieving infants. There simply is not enough data to determine the ages of Lydia's household. To appeal to Lydia's household as

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<sup>60</sup>Acts 10:47; 11:14; 16:15, 32–33; and 18:8.

<sup>61</sup>Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," 62.

evidence of infant baptism is begging the question.<sup>62</sup> Aside from Lydia's household baptism (which is not determinative either way), every other account of baptism in the New Testament supports the baptism of disciples alone.

### **Conclusion**

The Holy Spirit graciously inspired and preserved Scripture so that the gospel can be clearly understood. First Corinthians 15:1–8 defines the gospel as Christ dying for our sins according to the Scripture, being buried, rising again, and appearing to over five hundred. This gospel must be preached, believed, and held onto for salvation.

Undergirding the human act of repentance and faith is the Spirit's work to cause the new birth. Apart from the Spirit, the flesh is incapable of understanding and believing the gospel in a saving way. Conversion, defined as believing in Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins and being given a new nature, must occur for there to be salvation.

While conversion is not the same thing as baptism, they are inseparable. Romans 6:1–4 demonstrates how union with Christ happens through faith-filled baptism and marks entrance into the new covenant church. Examples from the book of Acts prove the necessity of faith for baptism and encourage pastors and leaders to consider the fitness of those children seeking baptism. Now that the exegetical foundation has been laid, the next chapter will demonstrate how parents, pastors, and a curriculum have important roles for helping children test themselves to see if they are in the faith.

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<sup>62</sup>Stein writes, "The argument that the households of Lydia and Crispus must have included children and that their baptism is an example of 'infant' baptism is a *non sequitur*." Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ROLE OF PARENTS, PASTORS, AND CURRICULUM

Parents, pastors, and curriculum have important roles in helping children test themselves to see if they are in the faith and ready for baptism. Christians are, in fact, commanded to test themselves to see if they are in the faith. Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 13:5 and 2 Peter 1:10 will demonstrate this requirement necessarily includes all those seeking baptism. Parents and pastors should teach and lead children in this discipleship process. Parents are the primary disciple makers in the home and therefore have the responsibility for preparing their children for baptism. Pastors have oversight of the members of the church and therefore have the responsibility for testing the fitness of all those seeking baptism. After demonstrating the importance of parents' and pastors' roles concerning discipleship, a survey of available baptism preparation curriculum will demonstrate the weaknesses of available curriculum and the necessity of writing a new curriculum.

#### **2 Corinthians 13:5 and 2 Peter 1:10**

Paul commands the Christians at Corinth to thoroughly examine themselves to determine if they are in the faith. The repetition of the command in 2 Corinthians 13:5 emphasizes the importance of this practice. Apparently, the Corinthians were in danger of falling into sin that would bring their salvation into question (12:20, 21; 13:2, 10). The solution was for the Corinthians to give careful attention to their salvation. They must determine with confidence that Christ is in each of them. Passing the test will thereby prove their own genuineness and the genuineness of Paul as an apostle.

Examining and testing oneself involves a thorough search for proof. Louw and Nida define examine as, “to try to learn the nature or character of someone or something by submitting such to thorough and extensive testing.”<sup>1</sup> It is common practice in churches today to ask two simple questions to determine if a person is in the faith. Those questions generally include a doctrinal question about the person’s belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and a personal question about the person’s reception of Christ as Lord. Simple affirmations of the resurrection and lordship of Christ are considered sufficient testing. While Romans 10:9 affirms the necessity of believing in the resurrection and lordship of Christ for salvation, 1 Corinthians 13:5 calls for careful testing to determine if this belief is effective in the life of the Christian.

It is important to clarify what Christians should be looking for when they test themselves, and it is equally important to teach new believers how to examine themselves. Philip Hughes defines the test as a self-examination that “reveals that they have experience of the grace of God.”<sup>2</sup> Christians should be able to identify in themselves where the grace of God is transforming their thinking and living to match that of Christ. Parents and pastors should therefore help new believers understand how Christ’s way of life differs from their own. Colin Kruse explains the test as seeing “whether they are holding to the faith, *i.e.* the gospel, and conforming their lives to it.”<sup>3</sup> Part of the test of being in the faith is being able to accurately define the faith. Building on the previous section exegeting 1 Corinthians 15:1–5, Christians should have biblical clarity concerning the content of the gospel and be able to articulate how their lives are

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<sup>1</sup>J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:331, electronic ed.

<sup>2</sup>Philip E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 480.

<sup>3</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 219.

conforming to it. Careful examination should reveal repentance of sin, relief of guilt, and progress in sanctification due to the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Parents and pastors must reinforce the gospel and give personal instruction on how to trust Christ and change.

The particular test for the Corinthians centers on their acceptance of the apostolic gospel. Scott Hafemann explains, “Allegiance to him as their apostle is the criterion that determines whether Christ is present in their lives, since Paul is confident that he himself has already passed the test (13:6).”<sup>4</sup> The grace that empowered Paul’s ministry and preaching will be evident in the lives of those who pass the test. This claim is based on the understanding that the same Jesus is enlivening all true believers. This criterion still applies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is only one Jesus and only one gospel. Those seeking baptism must be able to articulate the apostolic gospel and be able to identify the simplest evidence of repentance and faith. Additional evidence includes holding fast to the gospel, the beginnings of the fruit of the Spirit, and a willingness to turn from sin (1 Cor 15:1–2; Gal 5:22–24; 2 Cor 13:7).

The topic of assurance of salvation is found in gospel tracts like “Four Spiritual Laws.” “Four Spiritual Laws” addresses the new believer as one in whom Christ has surely come and taken up residence.<sup>5</sup> At this point, 2 Peter 1:10 is necessary. Regarding the reality of salvation, 2 Peter 1:10 gives tangible help so that the Christian can know Christ is in him/her. The details of the verse warrant careful study below. Concerning discipleship, teaching new believers preparing for baptism to make their calling and election sure will help establish them in the faith. There is a powerful promise attached to following the commands of 2 Peter 1:3–7, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing,

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<sup>4</sup>Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 493.

<sup>5</sup>Bill Bright, “Four Spiritual Laws,” accessed February 10, 2018, <https://crustore.org/downloads/4laws.pdf>.

they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 8). New believers need to be taught how to make their calling and election sure as evidence for baptism and also in order to keep growing in godliness.

There is an inseparable connection between being united to Christ, growing in Christlikeness, and possessing assurance of salvation. Schreiner states that in 2 Peter the concern is that “godly qualities must exist and overflow in the lives of his readers . . . but he also was saying that those who lack godly virtues and are not abounding with them give no indication that they are believers.”<sup>6</sup> Making one’s calling and election sure therefore includes a biblical understanding of godly virtues and evidence of progress in them. Of particular use to this project is the connection between continuing fruitfulness in the faith and baptism. Schreiner notes, “The cleansing from past sins refers to baptism, where the baptismal waters symbolize the washing away of sin and hence the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>7</sup> Continual growth in one’s appreciation of the gospel, with emphasis on baptism, keeps believers from becoming unfruitful in their knowledge of Christ. Parents and pastors should aim to provide a strong understanding of the gospel, prior to and proclaimed in baptism. The goal of discipleship, begun at baptism, is to establish the believer in his/her understanding of Christ so that the Christian continues to grow in virtue. United to Christ, Christians will make progress in these godly virtues of 1 Peter 2:5–7 and thereby make their calling and election sure.

God’s prior call and election are the foundation for the giving of grace which enables the virtues. Practicing the grace-empowered virtues then produces assurance of election. Schreiner explains, “Those who practice such virtues will also experience subjective assurance, but we should note that their objective obedience is the foundation

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville; Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 302–3.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.



for their subjective assurance.”<sup>8</sup> Parents and pastors must teach the gospel in such a way that obedience is encouraged and assurance is gained. Teaching new believers how to obey all of Jesus’ commandments includes the command to be baptized. Disciple-makers therefore have a great opportunity at this point to begin teaching new believers how to be fruitful in their knowledge of Christ by being baptized. Considering 2 Peter 1:10, careful attention should be given to helping the new believer identify evidence of election, which is gospel growth in godly virtues. Baptism preparation curriculum can be utilized to accomplish this task.

### **The Role of Parents**

God ordained the family so that parents possess the place of greatest influence on their children. The Old and New Testaments offer helpful instruction for parents as they seek to rear, teach, and disciple their children. This section will apply pertinent passages related to parenting to discipleship and preparing children for baptism. Attention will be given to the overarching role of parents and the daily influence parents exercise in their children’s lives.

Daniel Block summarizes the role of fathers in the Old Testament as “nurturing their sons’ spiritual development, modeling before them their own deep personal commitment to God and the Scriptures, instructing them in the Scriptures and the traditions of salvation and covenant, and giving public witness to their spiritual commitment.”<sup>9</sup> Block builds this claim on Exodus 12:24; 13:8; and Deuteronomy 6:7–9, 20–25. Parents should seek faithfulness in four main areas: instruction, nurture, modeling, and integrity. Instruction includes teaching children about God, salvation, and life from the Bible. Furthermore, God requires more than teaching biblical truths. Biblical

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<sup>8</sup>Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 303.

<sup>9</sup>Daniel Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Daniel (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 53.

parenting must include nurturing repentance, faith, and obedience through encouragement and discipline in everyday life. Parents should graciously attempt to use each situation, temptation, success, and fear as an opportunity to encourage faith. Additionally, parents cannot underestimate the power of their personal faith and obedience to Christ. This is the reason Block emphasizes modeling and integrity. Faithful parents demonstrate obedience to Christ as they teach their children to obey Christ. This teaching requires integrity as parents strive to be consistent with their biblical instruction, private lives, and public witness. Since living a life of personal faith is powerful for instructing children, one of the most detrimental things a parent can do is refuse to repent of hypocrisy. In summary, faithful parenting involves the rigorous pursuit of obedience and faith in each child by giving biblical instruction and tender correction from a heart of personal integrity.

Parents must resist the temptation to allow the church or school to usurp their role as primary spiritual influencers. Köstenberger and Davis appreciate the supportive role other teachers fill, but state plainly, “Parents must never go back on their God-given responsibility to be the primary source of religious instruction for their children.”<sup>10</sup> Children are commanded to obey their parents while parents, and fathers in particular, are to bring up their children according to the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:1–4; Col 3:20). Anecdotally, parents in the church seem to understand they should be teaching and nurturing their children in the faith. However, some parents do not know how to teach and nurture their children. Walter Henrichsen divides development into three categories which provide a helpful perspective for parents as they seek to disciple their children. Henrichsen’s three categories are teaching, training, and building.<sup>11</sup> The primary source for teaching, training, and building is the Bible.

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<sup>10</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 94.

<sup>11</sup>Walter A. Henrichsen, *Disciples Are Made Not Born: Helping Others Grow to Maturity in*

Daily intake of Scripture is crucial for the development of a disciple. In a recent study of young adult Christians, Jana Magruder identified fifteen influencers of spiritual health. She discovered that “the single greatest contribution to raising fully-devoted, Christ following young adults is regular—not daily or religiously, just regular—Bible reading.”<sup>12</sup> While Magruder is hesitant to recommend daily Bible reading, she is clear on the need for parents to be reading the Bible so that parents are able to point children toward Christ with personal authenticity. The most fruitful position from which to make disciples is a home where parents and children engage in regular Bible reading with the goal of helping one another conform to God’s Word. Parents must teach their children to read, understand, and live in step with the Bible.

Magruder and Henrichsen agree on the importance of training and building disciples. Henrichsen defines training as the imparting of skill and building as the imparting of character.<sup>13</sup> Magruder writes, “As parents engage Scripture and become more like Jesus, they mature their ability to see the world through a biblical lens and gain a Holy Spirit-driven opportunity to point out the truths they learn to their kids along the way.”<sup>14</sup> Disciples need to be taught how to handle temptation, trust Christ, repent of sin, handle conflict, grow in relationships, and honor God with their bodies. Parents should take an active role in teaching children how to navigate the various circumstances of life with faith. Skills, however, are not enough. God also expects parents to shape and develop the character of their children.

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*Christ*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 1988), 80.

<sup>12</sup>Jana Magruder, *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith* (Nashville: LifeWay Christian Resources, 2017), 52.

<sup>13</sup>Henrichsen, *Disciples Are Made*, 80.

<sup>14</sup>Magruder, *Nothing Less*, 66.

The triad of head, hands, and heart is helpful at this point in considering the development of children. Parents teach biblical truth; this is the head. Parents help their children develop skills necessary for a fruitful Christian life; this is the hands. Parents also shape their children's character; this is the heart. The high calling of a parent is teaching the child how to turn away from sin and love the Lord. Connecting Matthew 22:37–39, Tedd and Margy Tripp write, “[God] tells and shows us the truth about what is valuable, what is worth living and dying for, what is worth doing and being, and what gives our lives significance.”<sup>15</sup> Parents model Christian growth through repentance and faith and a growing love for God and neighbor. This genuine development of the parent's character, along with the intentional rejection of hypocrisy, encourages a safe environment where parents can address their children's sins and weaknesses with the gospel. The goal of parenting is the formation of Christlike thinking and character through an authentic discipleship relationship built on grace and God's Word.

Preparing a child for baptism provides an opportunity to establish and reinforce good discipleship practices. After overviewing the role of family in the New Testament, Köstenberger and Jones write,

In the case of one's own children . . . discipleship entails baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and being taught to obey everything Jesus commanded his followers (cf. v. 19). Baptism and committed instruction, formal (such as by way of catechism, Sunday school, or programs like Awana in a church context or as part of a deliberate, intentional plan of instruction in the home) as well as informal (as opportunities arise), are not optional but form an essential part of life in God's integrated design of marriage and the family.<sup>16</sup>

It is commendable to retain the inseparable nature of baptism and discipleship. It is uncommon, however, to make the connection clear so that parents faithfully integrate baptism into discipleship. The basic idea is preparing for baptism provides parents an

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<sup>15</sup>Tedd Tripp and Margy Tripp, *Instructing a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>16</sup>Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 115.

opportunity for committed instruction and the establishment of a discipling relationship. While allowing debate concerning how quickly to baptize, there should be no debate on the necessity of ensuring the one being baptized has a biblical understanding of baptism. Formal instruction would include catechism and curriculum which teach a proper understanding of baptism. Informal instruction would include everyday conversations about the gospel, union with Christ, and obedience. Utilizing a daily Bible reading plan provides natural conversation starters as parents and children interact throughout the day. Working through a Bible study on baptism provides the intentional instruction necessary for every disciple.

God has ordained the family so that parents are the primary spiritual influencers of their children. Parents are to teach, train, and build up their children according to Scripture. Ephesians 6:4 sets the goal for parents: bring up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Parents should utilize everyday informal situations and intentional formal teaching to correct sin and encourage faith. One of the earliest formal teaching opportunities is preparing for baptism. Pastors should be intentional to help parents prepare their children for baptism.

### **The Role of Pastors**

The biblical titles elder, overseer, and pastor provide a helpful description of a pastor's role. God gives his church pastors who exercise oversight of the members with maturity and benevolence. In Acts 20:28, Paul commands the elders to pay careful attention to all the flock. First Thessalonians 5:12–13 encourages the church to esteem lovingly those who are over them and work among them. Pastors must care for the church the way a faithful father cares for his family (1 Tim 3:5). These leaders are to keep watch over souls while members are to obey and submit to their care (Heb 13:17). Peter exhorts elders to shepherd eagerly the flock, exercising oversight and setting the example for those in their charge (1 Pet 5:2–3). Of particular application to this project is the

requirement that elders be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:9).

The role of a pastor includes the responsibility to instruct members and parents so that they attain a biblical theology of conversion and baptism. Pastors instruct in two primary ways: public preaching and individual teaching. The recommendation is not to preach specifically on conversion each Sunday, but to explain conversion and its necessity when appropriate to the text. Individual discipleship compliments large group teaching. Even in smaller churches like MBC, it is not uncommon for parents to approach the pastors with questions about baptism. Generally, parents initiate the conversation because a child is asking questions at home about being baptized. God has given pastors the responsibility to instruct these parents concerning biblical conversion and baptism while correcting any errors. Teaching the truth and correcting errors require a personal knowledge of the individual. Pastors should respond to parents by setting up a meeting with the child and parents to discuss baptism. This meeting should not be a theology lecture but rather a conversation with the child devoted to drawing out his/her understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism.

Alongside developing a curriculum for parents and children, this project includes the development of questions for pastors to use when talking with the child and parents prior to baptism.<sup>17</sup> These questions should be utilized to start a conversation that helps determine the next appropriate step for the child. Topics include the gospel, personal awareness of sin, the necessity of belief in Christ, and a biblical understanding of baptism. Additionally, the role of Bible reading and prayer is included to help identify the beginnings of spirituality and how to encourage the spiritual disciplines. Some children will give evidence of a personal knowledge of God through Jesus Christ,

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<sup>17</sup>Pastoral interview questions are included in appendix 4.

repentance, and a biblical understanding of baptism. These children should be encouraged to pursue baptism as soon as possible. The pastoral interview may also reveal areas where the child needs additional instruction. Deficiencies concerning the gospel, conversion, and baptism should be addressed through pastors equipping parents to teach their children. The baptism preparation curriculum included in this project is specifically designed to address these deficiencies.

Dennis Rainey identifies conviction and courage as two necessary components of church leaders seeking to bring about a family reformation.<sup>18</sup> While Rainey's focus is on equipping distinctly Christian marriages and families, his application is pertinent to the subject of conversion. Pastors must possess conviction concerning biblical conversion, and pastors must exercise courage to lead according to that conviction. In a healthy church, where the gospel is preached and people are being baptized, children will likely be interested in baptism. Some of these children will not understand the gospel, or give evidence of conversion, and will therefore need to be refused baptism so that additional evangelism can occur. The pastoral interview, with parents present, seeks to identify either readiness for baptism or errors in doctrine. With this knowledge, pastors can then equip parents to teach their children. Another reason for the interview is to help make it obvious to the parent when a child is not ready to be baptized. A parent's desire to see his/her child born again and baptized is good and right. Baptizing the unconverted is dangerous and often desensitizes the child to the call to repent and believe. While fulfilling their role, pastors must reject subjectivism and focus on the child's ability and willingness to confess Christ as Lord, explain the gospel at an age appropriate level, and give evidence of repentance and faith. At this point, the pastor's public teaching ministry should be applied carefully to the individual child. Pastors must have convictions

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<sup>18</sup>Dennis Rainey, "Local Church Family Ministry in the New Millenium," in *Building Strong Families*, ed. Dennis Rainey (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 17.

regarding conversion and courage to apply those convictions, especially when a child wants to be baptized but does not understand the gospel or give evidence of conversion. An advantage of the plurality of elders is several pastors can work together with one family to discern readiness for baptism, and also the plurality of elders can bear the potential conflict together when a child is refused baptism.

A pastor's role includes developing a biblical theology of conversion and baptism as well as equipping parents to read, understand, and apply God's Word to everyday life. Magruder wisely recommends, "The church must begin with a solid discipleship model empowering moms and dads to grow in Christ and take responsibility for their spiritual maturity."<sup>19</sup> Parents who do not actively read and apply the Bible to their own lives will struggle when pastors act on convictions, apply the Bible to a child's life, and recommend a strategic plan for teaching the child. Parents who are being disciplined and take responsibility for their own spiritual growth are well positioned to disciple and help their children take responsibility for their own spiritual growth. Personally discerning their own deficiencies equips parents to identify and address the needs of their children. Pastors must, therefore, equip parents to read, understand, and apply God's Word. Parents should be engaged with daily Bible reading plans, one-on-one discipleship, and expository preaching. The spiritual development of parents is a powerful tool for evangelizing and discipling children. The period of time spent preparing a child for baptism provides pastors with the opportunity to equip parents for long term discipleship.

Parents preparing their children for baptism provides an opportunity for pastors to build mentoring relationships with parents. Ephesians 4:11–12 defines the pastor's role as equipping the saints for the work of the ministry so that the church is built up. This

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<sup>19</sup>Magruder, *Nothing Less*, 56.



role certainly includes equipping parents to disciple their children. In a recent study of parents, Timothy Paul Jones discovered that the majority of parents understand themselves, not the pastors, to bear primary responsibility for discipling their children.<sup>20</sup> The parents' disconnect between understanding their role and actually discipling their children is found in a lack of training and a lack of priority.<sup>21</sup> Jones observed that parents are not discipling their children because parents do not know how to disciple, and discipling is not important to parents.

The author has given several parents in MBC an earlier version of the baptism preparation curriculum included in this project. It is common for parents not to complete the curriculum simply because doing so is not a priority. When following up, parents say the curriculum is helpful and not difficult to understand. The problem is making discipleship a priority. Those parents who are already engaging their children through family worship are more likely to finish the curriculum than those parents who are not actively involved in the spiritual development of their children. Consequently, the role of a pastor is not simply to identify and disseminate good biblical content to families. God ordains pastors to teach, encourage, build up, and equip parents to disciple their children. Parents need instruction concerning their role, parents need to be equipped to fulfill their role, and parents need encouragement to continue faithfully in their role. The baptism preparation curriculum presented here is not intended to continue indefinitely. Instead, pastors can use the situation of preparing for baptism to solidify a biblical theology of conversion and baptism, equip parents to disciple their children, and encourage parents to continue as the primary teachers in the home. For this reason, a basic Bible reading plan is included in the curriculum along with resources for continuing discipleship. Pastors

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<sup>20</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide; How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples*, (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 98.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 100.

must equip parents to disciple their children while exercising oversight of each candidate's readiness for baptism.

### **Current Baptism Preparation Curriculum**

It is an understandable assumption that the long-running denominational debate over baptism would create a substantial amount of teaching material devoted to a biblical understanding of baptism. While the pastoral and seminary levels have created an almost insurmountable amount of information, there is comparatively little written specifically to help new converts understand the gospel and baptism. This section is a critique of baptism preparation materials currently available to parents and children. The goal is to identify strengths to be duplicated, weaknesses to be avoided, and prove the need for a new baptism preparation curriculum.

#### ***Preparing Young People for Baptism* by David Michael**

*Preparing Young People for Baptism*,<sup>22</sup> written by David Michael of Children Desiring God, includes a mentor's guide and a pastor's supplement in two separate resources. The mentor's guide covers the necessity of personal faith, assurance of salvation, the gospel, making a decision for Christ, sharing a testimony, and baptism. Parents are expected to work through these six sessions over a period of eight weeks. One obvious strength of this curriculum is the emphasis on the role of the parent or mentor. *Preparing Young People for Baptism* is meant to be studied by the mentor and then adapted for personal use with each child. Mentors are also encouraged to use the material in connection with their pastors and local church. Where the church has not formally adopted the curriculum, the mentor is still encouraged to seek the involvement

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<sup>22</sup>David Michael, *Preparing Young People for Baptism: Mentor's Guide* (Minneapolis: Children Desiring God, 2001), and Michael, *Preparing Young People for Baptism: Pastor's Supplement*, (Minneapolis: Children Desiring God, 2001).

of pastors for the purpose of seeking a pastoral interview to determine readiness for baptism and church membership.

The importance of prayer is emphasized throughout *Preparing Young Persons*. Mentors are instructed to consider prayerfully their own spiritual health and obedience prior to starting the meetings. Enlisting prayer support from other Christians during the time of preparation is crucial because of the reality of spiritual warfare and spiritual blindness. Finally, regarding prayer, mentors are encouraged to make prayer a significant part of each session. While preparing for baptism, parents should intentionally teach their children how to pray and thereby help establish a pattern of prayer in the child's life.

*Preparing Young Persons for Baptism* is clearly committed to the importance of Scripture. After the introduction section establishing how to conduct each meeting, the majority of each section is dedicated to Scripture. This strength, however, leads to one of the weaknesses of this curriculum. Parents who utilize the mentor's guide are required to explain the passages and formulate discussion questions largely on their own. Pages 19–22 illustrate this weakness. Parents are told to “help the candidate understand that each of us must respond to God personally and individually” (19). While the candidates are instructed to describe what each passage teaches “in his own words,” there is little instruction given to help parents navigate twenty-five verses from eight passages. As mentioned above in connection with the findings of Timothy Paul Jones, parents need to be taught how to teach their children. The current culture of MBC requires that baptism preparation curriculum include extensive help for parents. This does not imply that the curriculum should do the work for the parents but should seek to train the parents as they are doing the work.

Michael does an excellent job instructing parents regarding the biblical marks of conversion (23). Discussion questions are provided as well as an overview of Wayne Grudem's tests of genuine faith from his systematic theology. The greatest benefit of

*Preparing Young Persons for Baptism* is its careful help identifying biblical marks of conversion while leading parents to discuss these marks with their children. All baptism preparation curriculum should likewise include instruction on the marks of biblical conversion.

Brevity is one of the weaknesses of the mentor's guide. The sections on the gospel and writing out one's testimony are surprisingly short; less than a page each. True, parents are directed to the first two chapters of John Piper's book *Desiring God* and the tract "Quest for Joy," but again, parents need training on how to share the gospel clearly to children. An additional weakness of the mentor's guide is a lack of biblical explanation and guided instruction on the nature of faith.

The weakness of brevity in section five is less pronounced in section 6. Baptism is given a thorough treatment with nine individual explanations and multiple biblical references. Able parents will find plenty to discuss with their children in this section. Parents, however, who lack the training or ability to create their own discussion questions could be tempted simply to read the provided statements and passages. Providing discussion questions to help children understand the passages would make this work, and similar resources, much more effective.

The weakness of a lack of helps in the mentor's guide is addressed in the companion pastor's supplement. The mentor's guide is fifty-five pages long. Adjusted for formatting, the supplement is sixty-six pages long. Of note is the requirement that mentors attend a two-hour mentor orientation session; candidates for baptism must not attend. The entire baptism preparation process is explained during this session. A pastor or staff member leads mentors through the six individual sessions with time for questions and discussion of the material. It is clear from the pastoral supplement that the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church have created a well-defined and documented system to encourage parents to seek the conversion and baptism of their children.

The pastoral supplement provides several helpful elements which will influence this project. The first benefit is the responsibility to train and encourage parents to prepare their children for baptism. Parents and children need to be equipped by their pastors to use biblical and age appropriate curriculum to prepare for baptism. In light of the many distractions of life, parents will also benefit from encouragement while teaching their children. Michael recommends a contact by letter. The second benefit is addressing the reality that some children who want to be baptized need to wait, and some parents who want their child to be baptized need to be told to wait. All baptism preparation curriculum should seek to equip parents to recognize the presence of, or lack of, readiness for baptism. Michael utilizes the role of pastors at this point providing helpful instruction and questions for pastors to use when interviewing children seeking baptism.

Overall, these two resources from David Michael are of benefit when both are utilized in a church. A less experienced parent trying to follow the mentor's guide, without the equipping ministry of a pastor, will likely struggle. In the pastor's supplement Michael writes, "I am persuaded that the church can prepare young people for baptism in a way that glorifies God and enables us to fulfill our charge to responsibly oversee the ordinance of baptism without usurping a significant responsibility, privilege and blessing that rightfully belongs to parents" (5). Building on the strengths of Michael's work, an additional curriculum that provides discussion helps and a more detailed explanation of the gospel would be a benefit to MBC.

***Preparing Your Child for Baptism by  
Josh Mulvihill***

Josh Mulvihill wrote *Preparing Your Child for Baptism*<sup>23</sup> in order to equip parents to prepare their children for baptism. Theologically, Mulvihill is committed to

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<sup>23</sup>Josh Mulvihill, *Preparing Your Child for Baptism*, last modified 2012, accessed February 27, 2018, [http://www.atgrace.com/sites/default/files/Preparing%20your%20child%20for%20baptism\\_8.pdf](http://www.atgrace.com/sites/default/files/Preparing%20your%20child%20for%20baptism_8.pdf).

believer's baptism by immersion as a sign of identification with Christ's death and resurrection. Parents and children are instructed to work through the eight steps together, either over three meetings or in a special day away together. The goals of the study are to help parents discern if a child is believing the gospel, understands baptism, and is ready to share his/her testimony at baptism. Seeing that pastors are given the responsibility to oversee baptism, parents should actively seek the help of their pastors regarding their child's readiness for baptism.

Mulvihill instructs parents to give attention to their child's understanding of the gospel and affection for Christ. In each step, he utilizes questions to help parents start the conversation and draw out the child's understanding. The first section of the curriculum is devoted to the gospel. Mulvihill writes, "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" (6). Parents are given a brief biblical explanation of these four primary doctrines and are expected to master each prior to meeting with the child. During the meeting, parent and child discuss Ephesians 2:1-9, and then the child is asked to share how he/she would explain the gospel with a friend. The second meeting is dedicated to preparing the child to make a public profession of Christ at baptism and grasp the significance of baptism.

Considerable space is dedicated to ensuring a biblical understanding of baptism. Mulvihill asserts, "A baptism, administered properly, should reveal belief, summarize faith, proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus, and incorporate the believer into the church" (13). Steps three through eight expound Mulvihill's assertion. He answers the why, what, who, when, and how questions of baptism. The last step for parent and child is to write out the child's testimony to be delivered at baptism. After meeting with a pastor and agreeing on readiness for baptism, parents should plan a

celebration which will follow the baptism. Considerable help is given for writing out a testimony and suggestions are made for the celebration.

The strengths of *Preparing Your Child for Baptism* are seen in Mulvihill's commitment to the gospel and teaching the biblical doctrine of believer's baptism. He summarizes the gospel saying, "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" (9). The treatment of believer's baptism is thorough, biblical, and the discussion questions for each step are thought provoking. Mulvihill is clear concerning the connection between baptism and church membership and emphasizes the commitment to Christ and the church throughout the book. The teaching sections intended to prepare parents are full of Scripture, and the able parent will find plenty to teach.

One weakness of *Preparing Your Child for Baptism* is the small amount of help offered to parents as they teach. A parent who regularly teaches children and develops lessons from the Bible will appreciate this book, but parents with little experience transitioning from Bible study to age appropriate teaching might struggle to form their own teaching plan. A minor issue is the confusion over the steps. Mulvihill recommends three sessions and divides the material into eight steps. The curriculum would be easier to follow if divided along the lines of the three recommended sessions or the eight separate steps. Theologically, one improvement would be a longer treatment of the marks of conversion or evidence of faith. In summary, theologically mature or experienced teachers will appreciate this book. Less mature or less experienced parents will require help preparing the material. Another baptism preparation curriculum should be written utilizing Mulvihill's theological commitments and treatment of baptism while providing ample help for parents.

***Basics for New Baptists: Youth Edition* by Ernest E. Mosely and DeRema Dunn**

*Basics for New Baptists: Youth Edition*<sup>24</sup> can be compared to an introduction to theology for Southern Baptists. The study consists of eight chapters, with five sections per chapter. Mosely and Dunn intend for youth to complete one section a day, Monday through Friday, and then gather weekly to discuss what is learned, either one-on-one or with a group. Each section includes an explanation of doctrine, questions to be answered from the Bible, illustrations, and a section for participants to write down what they are learning. The authors are clear concerning their purpose, “This book was written to teach you the basics of being a Baptist” (4). This resource is reviewed here because the authors include an explanation of the gospel, baptism, and what it means to be saved. While Mosely and Dunn intend *Basics for New Baptists* to be used in multiple situations such as introducing Baptist polity or the importance of church membership, it also an appropriate resource for preparing youth for baptism in a Southern Baptist context.

Mosely and Dunn begin their study with an explanation of the Trinity and each person’s work to save sinners. Sin is defined as “making self the center of life instead of God” (22). Chapter one ends with a discussion of the church as the family of God through faith in God’s Son. Chapter two addresses the image of God lost through sin and restored through regeneration. Participants are instructed to write out their own experiences of regeneration giving attention to their life before Jesus, how they realized their need for Jesus, how they received Jesus, and how Jesus is currently making a difference in their lives (26). Woven throughout the study is the joy of salvation and the obligation to share the gospel with others (27, 42, 59, 67, 92, 105). References to Baptist doctrine, the Council of Nicaea, and older hymns help connect the participants with church history.

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<sup>24</sup>Ernest E. Mosley and DeRema Dunn, *Basics for New Baptists: Youth Edition* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1989).



Chapter 3 covers the various aspects of professing one's faith in God. Those who trust in Christ's death and resurrection are to make a public confession of Jesus as Lord. Youth who believe in Jesus for salvation but have not been baptized are encouraged to talk to a pastor and continue with the study. Chapter 3 section 2 explains baptism emphasizing Acts 2:41–42; 9:17–20; and 16:25–33. Baptism is for believers only, by immersion, and “is an outward symbol of an inward experience” (35). Teaching a biblical understanding of baptism can be difficult, and discussion questions can be helpful for drawing out a youth's understanding. Mosley and Dunn prompt the participants with questions such as “How would you respond to a friend who asked, ‘Why don't Baptists baptize babies?’” Parents and pastors will find the participants' answers helpful when looking for errors in a child's understanding of baptism.

In chapters 4–8, Mosely and Dunn expound the biblical and baptistic doctrines of Scripture, the church, and the priesthood of believers. While the authors begin by stating they want to teach the basics of being a Baptist, they end with the call to sanctification: “We are to be God's people prepared for works of service, becoming mature, showing the likeness of Christ, standing strong in the face of false teachings, speaking truth in a loving way, growing and helping others grow in Christlikeness” (102). Mosely and Dunn work toward that goal.

The strengths of *Basics for New Baptists* are its systematic approach to understanding God and salvation, its emphasis on the church, and the repeated call to share the gospel with others. The discussion guide in the back of the study offers both group and one-to-one study options. Parents will find the one-to-one study sections beneficial. The illustrations and questions help reinforce truths and ensure understanding. Mosely and Dunn are intentional throughout the study to have participants look up passages, explain what the Bible says, and check interpretations against historic Baptist doctrine. They explain and actively encourage participants to engage in a daily quiet time.

Churches whose identity is Southern Baptist, first and foremost, will find this study helpful when passing on the SBC legacy to the next generation.

The most obvious weakness of the study is that it is no longer in print, so while available, it is difficult to find. Regarding content, more space is devoted to explaining church programs, local associations, and various SBC entities than what is given to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Mosely and Dunn write from what has become known as the traditional Baptist understanding of salvation and therefore reject the biblical doctrine of God's election of individuals for salvation (26). The authors regularly introduce conflicting positions taken by various denominations and quote extensively from the Baptist Faith and Message (12, 22, 29, 30, 34, 37, 47, 53, 57). Mentors and parents who have not considered these various positions could find the introduction of competing ideas distracting, if not unsettling. On the other hand, those participants looking for a comparison of denominational beliefs will appreciate the work.

In conclusion, *Basics for New Baptists* is a thorough introduction to Baptist doctrine with helpful information on salvation and baptism. Parents looking for curriculum that will compare various denominational teachings, while defending Southern Baptist doctrine, should invest in this study. This study should be avoided, however, if parents and pastors are looking for a thorough explanation of conversion and help establishing children in the gospel. The outdated information and minimal treatment of baptism and the marks of conversion necessitate the writing of another baptism preparation curriculum.

**“Baptism: Following through with Your Faith” published by SBTC Press**

*Baptism: Following through with Your Faith*<sup>25</sup> is a small tract produced by the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. Theologically, the tract advocates believer’s baptism by immersion and rejects infant baptism. The strength of the tract is its introduction of the major issues related to baptism. Baptism is necessary as an act of obedience to the command of Christ and the means of professing faith in Christ. Those people who have become believers in Christ should be baptized in a gathering of believers, most often the church. Readers are encouraged to follow the example of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:36 and ask, “Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” Answers are sought in the Bible, the church, and with the one who has given the tract. The final sections on why a person should be baptized and how baptism is done include nine bullet points; eight of the points have Scripture listed as support.

The strength of this work is the wide scope and brief format. The tract is easily read in a short amount of time and provides references for further study. The weakness of *Baptism: Following through with your Faith* is also its brevity. Pastors and parents should not rely on this resource as the sole means of preparing children for baptism. That being said, the tract is useful for introducing the biblical doctrine of baptism and can be used as an invitation to discuss the child’s readiness for baptism. When a child expresses interest in baptism, pastors can assign the tract to be read in preparation for the initial pastoral interview. Children who read the tract will be helped, and reading the tract will serve as a helpful test of the child’s and parents’ willingness to engage with pastors and do the work of discipleship.

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<sup>25</sup>Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, “Baptism: Following through with Your Faith.”

***I'm a Christians Now!* by Bowman,  
Leach, McAnally, and White**

LifeWay Christian Resources is the producer of *I'm a Christian Now!*<sup>26</sup> The suite of resources was written by Beth Bowman, Cindy Leach, Kelli McAnally, and Kristen White. *I'm a Christian Now!* is an eight-week introduction to Christianity which includes a leader guide, a younger kids activity book, an older kids activity book, resource CD-ROM, and two tracts. The initial impression of the materials is that they are beautifully compiled with a large number of activities. The children's manuals are printed in full-color and provide children five activities to complete at home each week, thus reinforcing the lessons. While the authors acknowledge parents could use the curriculum at home, the materials are written for use in a small group or Sunday school format. Parents and children meet separately each week. The majority of content is delivered by a teacher to the children during this weekly meeting. During the parent meeting, an instructor delivers mainly helps for leading a conversation instead of content for teaching children at home.

The content of the material is biblical and quite basic. The first week is devoted to explaining the gospel and is the strongest of all the lessons. *I'm a Christian Now!* explains the gospel using God rules, we sinned, God provided, Jesus gives, and we respond. The stand-alone tract written by Meredith Teasly compliments lesson one, and parents will find the Scripture, explanations, and discussion questions helpful. There is another tract included titled "The ABCs of Becoming a Christian" published by LifeWay Press. "The ABCs" is meant to be used in conjunction with lesson one in order to help bring children to a point of making a decision. Children are led through a provided prayer and given a space to record the event in case of doubts later in life. The activity sheets are little more than word puzzles. Parents looking to the activity sheets to provide discussion

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<sup>26</sup>Beth Bowman et al., *I'm a Christian Now!* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2017).

guides and Bible study helps will be disappointed. There is nothing unbiblical in the activity books, and they are quite beautiful, but there is little help when it comes to recognizing and celebrating biblical conversion. Sunday school or small group leaders who enjoy games, crafts, and activities will be delighted by this curriculum. Each lesson has two or three games and crafts.

Returning to content, *I'm a Christian Now!* is consistently biblical, and emphasis is placed on memorizing Scripture each week. Unfortunately, during week three, teachers will spend more time on the memory verse game than on helping children understand baptism. Baptism is reduced to following Jesus' example in Matthew 3:13–17 with a passing word about symbolizing Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord's Supper section ends with a curious activity wherein children make unleavened bread to take home, bake, and eat. The same pattern continues through the sections on the church, spiritual disciplines, sharing your testimony, living on mission, and seeking to live like Jesus throughout all of life. The material is beautiful, quite basic, and full of activities.

There are three resources on the CD-ROM that are particularly helpful. The first is the "Children & Salvation Parent Leaflet." The leaflet includes the five-point gospel outline with explanations and discussion questions. Additionally, the leaflet encourages parents to look for the signs that a child is becoming a Christian. Unfortunately, no help is given so that parents can look for and encourage biblical conversion. Alongside the leaflet are handouts used to discuss the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, worship, and giving. A reference is given with each topic and questions for discussions. Parents should pay careful attention not to miss these handouts because they are not provided in the activity books. The third valuable resource is the outline for writing a personal testimony of salvation; there are separate outlines for older and younger kids. These outlines effectively equip parents to teach their children how to write and share their testimonies.

On the back of the package, the authors promise a deeper understanding of salvation, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, the authors do not succeed on this point. Pastors and parents should not look to this curriculum to help them encourage the biblical marks of conversion, an age appropriate explanation of justification or repentance, or a biblical theology of baptism. Instead of a deeper understanding, churches and parents should use this material to introduce the concepts of salvation, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the church, and spiritual disciplines to young children. This is by far the most expensive of the material reviewed and delivers the least amount of biblical content and help to parents. Pastors and parents will need to utilize another resource if they are seeking to establish children in the faith, help them stand firm in the gospel, and understand the implications of baptism according to Romans 6:1–6.

***How to Prepare for Your Baptism* by  
Jerry Brecheisen**

Jerry Brecheisen writes *How to Prepare for Your Baptism*<sup>27</sup> from the Wesleyan perspective and affirms believer's baptism by immersion. The booklet is structured around eight basic questions about baptism. Each section concludes with three questions to challenge the reader's understanding of baptism and help identify the next step toward baptism. Brecheisen emphasizes baptism as a public declaration of salvation in Christ following repentance and faith. A majority of pages mention the public, declarative, or confessional aspect of baptism. The first question is "What is baptism?" After the comment "baptism is a way of publicly announcing your decision to commit your life to the Lord Jesus Christ," Brecheisen quotes Ephesians 2:8–9 to prove salvation is by grace and not by baptism (2). He then defines baptism as "outward, physical evidence of Christ's spiritual work deep within your heart." One requirement for baptism is the

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<sup>27</sup>Jerry Brecheisen, *How to Prepare for Your Baptism* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011).

candidate must have been born again. After a strange statement about physical birth being “the specific time and date of their arrival on planet Earth,” Brecheisen identifies the new birth by the marks of repentance of sin and asking Christ into one’s heart (4). In the next question, Brecheisen identifies the gospel as “good news about the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ” (6). Participants are encouraged to prepare their testimony and invite friends and family to the baptism. In a short space, *How to Prepare for Your Baptism* advances the biblical gospel and practice of believer’s baptism by immersion.

Brecheisen includes a surprising amount of practical information compared to the size of the booklet (19 pages). The author mentions woodwork, decorations, and handrails around the baptistry in the fifth question, “Where will I be baptized?” Question seven is “How do I prepare for baptism?” and is devoted to issues of clothing and personal grooming after baptism. Surely some will find this information helpful, but the wide divergence of practices makes this information superfluous. Instead of extended descriptions of practicalities, the author could have condensed these sections and dedicated space to further instruction regarding sin, repentance, and faith. The righteousness of Christ is never mentioned, and the claim that a person will “experience the warmth of God’s approval” in baptism needs explanation (1). The strengths of the booklet are the basic and biblical definitions of the gospel and baptism, along with thought provoking questions. Brecheisen created a booklet which will start the pastoral conversation regarding readiness for baptism, but a more detailed work would be helpful for the church.

### **Conclusion**

The biblical commands to examine oneself and test oneself are applicable to those seeking baptism. Parents are to fill the primary role of teaching the gospel to their children and instructing them to identify the marks of conversion. Most parents will need

to be equipped by their pastors to evangelize and disciple their children when preparing for baptism. Age appropriate curriculum that explains the gospel and baptism, identifies the marks of conversion, and encourages a continuing discipleship relationship in the home is an integral part of preparing for baptism. Multiple curricula currently exist but suffer from being simplistic or they do not provide adequate helps for parents. In light of these factors, an additional baptism preparation curriculum should be written to serve the families of MBC.



## CHAPTER 4

### PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter provides a detailed description of the preparation and implementation of the project. The primary elements of the project were writing the curriculum, recruiting parents and children, conducting initial pastoral interviews, implementing the class, and conducting final pastoral interviews.

#### **Writing the Curriculum**

I wrote an initial draft of the baptism preparation curriculum in the spring of 2013. Topics included God, man, Christ, salvation, conversion, baptism, living the Christian life, and the church. Once writing began, and the size of the curriculum multiplied, I realized a more focused study was needed. At that point, the topics were narrowed to God, man, Christ, salvation, and baptism. The first draft was completed in early 2016, and upon entering the Doctor of Ministry program at Southern Seminary, I was given permission to rewrite the curriculum as a part of my project.

The curriculum went through several rewrites. The second draft was completed in connection with a parenting class I taught at another church in our city. StoneWater Church was emphasizing healthy families and encouraging parents to disciple their children. I asked for the opportunity to pilot my curriculum with their families, and the pastor agreed. Their pastor asked that I submit my curriculum to their family pastor for review and approval. The content of the material was approved, but the family pastor wanted me to provide more direction to parents. At this stage, I added instructions guiding the parent and child to read particular sections of the study. Additionally, the family pastor of StoneWater asked me to add answers to the questions. His concern was

that parents, young in the faith, may not know the answers or may doubt their answers. I added answers for parents and took the opportunity to supplement the answers with descriptions of what repentance and faith may look like in a child.

Teaching the class at StoneWater was very different than my planned project at MBC. StoneWater was made up of mainly parents I had never met and children I would never interview. The project at MBC would cover the material in five sessions as opposed to one session at StoneWater. At StoneWater, I spent the majority of the class explaining the biblical marks of conversion and only a small amount of time explaining how to use the curriculum. I did not have time to cover the content of each unit. Feedback on the class was positive with parents gaining a better understanding of conversion. I am unaware of the usefulness of the curriculum itself. Teaching the material in this format was beneficial because the relationship with another church in our city was strengthened and adding answers for parents will help them discern the effects of conversion more easily.

The third draft was completed in connection with implementing the project at MBC. Over a five-week period I worked through the curriculum to address weaknesses and correct typos. At this point a friend recommended that I read Dennis Gunderson's book *Your Child's Profession of Faith*. I immediately recognized the similarities between my work and Gunderson's book. Gunderson's book helped me process further helps for parents to discern biblical conversion. I contacted Gunderson who graciously agreed to read my curriculum. He replied with no corrections or improvements and encouraged me to continue with the work.<sup>1</sup>

Seeking professional and detailed evaluations of my curriculum was difficult, and I was unable to receive the evaluations before starting the project at MBC.

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<sup>1</sup>Dennis Gunderson's email is included in appendix 6.

Evaluations with rubrics were given by Dr. William Cook of Southern Seminary and Dr. Shelly Melia of Dallas Baptist University. Dr. Cook is the supervisor of this project. Dr. Melia is the associate dean of the graduate school of ministry and the director of the children's ministry program. Their evaluations, and impact on the curriculum, will be discussed in chapter five of this project.

Another source of revisions to the curriculum came through early usage by another couple and with my own family. I worked through the curriculum with two of my daughters asking for their suggestions to improve understanding and remove distractions. The other couple provided grammatical corrections and encouragement to continue with the curriculum. In summary, this curriculum was written over a period of five years and underwent multiple changes due to the wisdom and implementation of numerous people in MBC and other churches.

### **Recruiting Children and Parents**

I recruited children and parents through two main channels: personal invitations and church-wide announcements. The simplest means of recruiting was church-wide announcements. For several weeks, our secretary placed information about the upcoming class in the bulletin, and the class was included in the verbal announcements at the end of our worship gatherings. Of the six families in the class, one family participated due to the church-wide announcements. The remaining five families heard the public announcements, but I also spoke to them personally about being involved in the class. I was able to identify these families because they had conveyed to me either an interest in baptism on the part of their child or a personal desire to disciple their child concerning salvation and baptism. In these conversations, I was careful to explain how this class would be a part of my project and include elements, such as the anonymous surveys, which will not be included in future classes. Predominantly, I focused the conversations on the parents' role as the primary teachers of their children,

the need to understand the biblical marks of conversion, and the promise of practical helps explaining baptism to children. One couple with young children chose to attend in order to get help for the future and insight for talking with their Episcopalian family members. Thankfully, all the families were glad to participate in the project and were willing to receive instruction for discipling their children.

One area of confusion during the recruiting phase was if the children should attend the class with the parents. Roughly half of the families assumed their children would attend. This misunderstanding provided multiple opportunities to reinforce the parent's role as primary disciple maker. When asked if the child should attend, I would emphasize the conviction that the parents are to teach the children and, as their pastor, I am to equip the parents to teach. All the parents responded positively to this challenge.

### **Conducting Initial Pastoral Interviews**

I was able to conduct initial pastoral interviews with five of the six children requesting baptism. The sixth child's parents were either out of town or unavailable. All of the interviews were conducted on Wednesday evenings during AWANA. I contacted the parents to set up the meetings and ensure that at least one parent would be present. My normal practice is to hold these conversations at the child's home. It generally takes an hour, to an hour and a half, to conduct these interviews in homes. The schedule of the project, and the availability of the families during AWANA, made it more feasible to meet on church property.

While the location and access were a benefit, there were some difficulties involved with conducting the interviews away from home. The first negative was that some of the children felt like they were in trouble. One boy said he had done this type of meeting before. When I pressed for an explanation, he said it was when he was sent to the principal at school. After that interview, I would jokingly tell each student he/she was not in trouble and not in the principal's office. This seemed to alleviate some fears, but the

classroom environment, and talking to the pastor, were intimidating for some children. Realizing this difficulty with the location, along with my previous experience interviewing children in their homes, I committed to conducting the final interviews in the families' homes.

Another drawback to meeting on church property was that several children were concerned about missing out on AWANA. I noticed when there was laughter or loud play outside the interview classroom, the children would lose their train of thought. One boy stated at the outset that he did not want to miss game time. I had to reassure some children that we would not talk longer than needed and I would make sure they had adequate time to say their verses before going home.

I began the interviews by explaining the pastor's calling to help each person take a step toward Jesus.<sup>2</sup> I tried to assure the child that my goal for the meeting was to help determine where he/she was spiritually. This information would allow us to make a plan for moving toward Jesus in repentance and faith or following Jesus in baptism. I explained several scenarios. Some children have been born again and understand baptism, so they will be scheduled for baptism. Other children may have been born again but the signs of conversion are vague. The next step is to study the Bible to gain a clearer understanding of salvation. Additionally, among students there is often a great deal of confusion regarding what happens in baptism, so biblical baptism must be taught. The next step with these students is to study Scripture and gain a biblical understanding of baptism. Finally, a number of children display no evidence of regeneration but ask to be baptized because they want to take the Lord's Supper. For these children a plan will be made to continue learning the Scriptures with their parents. The pastoral interview is

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<sup>2</sup>For a theological and practical explanation of helping others take a step toward Jesus through repentance and faith, see Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Vine Project: Shaping Your Ministry Culture Around Disciple-making* (Sydney: Mathias Media, 2016).

meant to provide information so that pastors and parents have a biblical and more accurate understanding of the child's spiritual condition.

Before asking the individual questions, I encouraged the children to give honest answers. I did not want them to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. I wanted them to tell me what they truly thought or believed. During the interview, I gave each student permission to not answer a question and tell me when the question was confusing. Openness was encouraged, and the children were given license to ask any question at any time and to continue doing so in the future.

The introductory question in the interview is "what is the Gospel?" The goal of this question is to determine the child's level of understanding of the righteous life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ as the means of salvation. Explanations of Romans 4:25, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, 2 Corinthians 5:21, or 1 Peter 3:18 would qualify as knowledgeable. Demonstrating knowledge and showing signs of personal appreciation for Jesus' work, such as relief or joy, would be characterized as very knowledgeable. Explaining the Gospel as "the story of Jesus" or "how a person is saved" would be somewhat knowledgeable. The simple responses "I don't know" or "the Bible" qualify as unknowledgeable.

The second question of "why do you need to believe in Jesus?" is meant to draw out a child's personal understanding and appreciation of Jesus. If the child is confused by this question, it is helpful to move directly to the third question, "do you ever sin? Can you give an example?" Combining these questions encourages a conversation about personal conviction of sin. The fourth question is "what do you do when you sin?" I looked for the students to express an age appropriate understanding of personal sin, a fear of God's judgment for sin, and a desire for forgiveness through faith in Christ crucified. The fourth question illustrates if a child is repenting to God and trusting in Jesus. A child who cannot give an example of personal sin, or cannot explain his/her

personal need for Jesus, would be classified as unknowledgeable. Demonstrating grief over personal sin, clarity concerning substitutionary atonement and repentance to God, would be labeled as very knowledgeable.

During the interviews, question five had to be rewritten. Initially, question five was “what happens when you believe in Jesus?” Most children were confused by this question. After two interviews, question five became, “why would God forgive you?” Most of the children answered with “God forgives me because he loves me.” The majority of children would not point to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the express means of forgiveness. There was no mention of Christ even when an explanation was sought by asking “what has to happen so that God forgives you?” The children held fast to the belief that God forgives because of his love without grounding that love in the work of Christ. Candidly, question five is abstract, but it does provide an opportunity to discern if the child is beginning to work out the implications of the cross and resurrection at a personal level, or if the child is simply repeating the gospel message from memory.

Question six contains several parts and is meant to demonstrate the existence of spiritual life displayed through a desire to read the Bible and pray. “Does the child read on his/her own, or only with the family? Does the child pray on his/her own, or only at meals with others? Does the child have an age appropriate Bible translation? Is the child growing in these disciplines, and how can parents encourage future growth?” The final question (number seven) deals directly with baptism: “If one of your friends asked you why you want to be baptized, what would you tell him/her?” I asked the student about friends from school, sports, dance, or church so that I could use a friend’s specific name. Question seven reveals the child’s understanding of why a person should be baptized and what happens to the person when baptized.

At the end of the initial interview I tried to describe a clear and accessible next step. For each child I celebrated what I saw God doing in his/her life. Some interviews

revealed that the student was grossly ignorant of the gospel, how to be saved, and the meaning of baptism. Most of the children were in the range of somewhat knowledgeable, and I encouraged them to begin working with their parents on the Bible study. In this group of students, there was only one child (a teenager) who gave credible evidence of a biblical understanding and personal appropriation of the gospel. With this student, I told her and her parents that she would likely be baptized soon.

Before moving to the class itself, it is important to discuss the benefit of having parents present for these interviews. With parents in the room, I was able to reinforce their role as primary teacher, clarify the next step with the child and parent, and make it evident when a child is not ready to be baptized. I have noticed that it can be difficult to help parents see, in a constructive manner, that their child who wants to be baptized should not be baptized. Asking these questions, and their appropriate follow-up questions, often revealed that a child was not ready for baptism. Typically, the children did not understand the Gospel, have an awareness of personal sin, or know the biblical meaning of baptism. The interview format allowed me to bring these deficiencies to the parent's attention.

After dismissing the child to AWANA, I would ask the parents how they thought the meeting went. Most of the parents were discouraged by their child's lack of interest in talking about the Gospel or they were surprised by their child's inability to explain salvation at a basic level. Again, bringing these deficiencies into the open in a nonconfrontational manner allowed me to celebrate the parent's commitment to continue teaching. Additionally, this information provided a clear rationale for parents to attend the class and be equipped to keep teaching their children the Scriptures.

### **Implementing the Class**

At MBC, the preparing for baptism class met for six weeks. Originally, the plan was to meet for five weeks to cover the five chapters. However, discussion of



baptism, and suggestions for making the baptism more memorable, made the class last one week longer than expected. Participants met in the church library and sat around tables that formed a large square and encouraged note taking. Each meeting began with a time of prayer in which parents were encouraged to pray for their children as well as the other families in the class. The genuine and serious tone of the prayers helped focus us on the important task of equipping one another to faithfully make disciples.

Upon arrival on week 1, participants completed the first parent survey. The first meeting was then devoted to briefly explaining the biblical marks of conversion, explaining how the study will work at home, and introducing part one. The marks of conversion were only introduced in order to provide the big picture of where the study was going.<sup>3</sup> A more detailed explanation of the evidence of regeneration is included in the study itself. Concerning the biblical marks of conversion, supporting passages were read by the parents and discussed with examples. Next, parents were taught how to use the study by discussing the lesson heading, memory verse, and big idea for part 1. Emphasis was placed on completing the memory work, both the Scripture memory and gospel outline. A short demonstration of how to work through a lesson was given, along with an admonition to read ahead and be prepared. Couples were encouraged to work together to complete the lessons and protect the agreed upon time for each meeting. There was not adequate time to teach the content of part 1. Before the first meeting concluded, parents decided on a time and place to discuss the first lesson with their children.

Our second meeting allowed time to discuss questions regarding the content of part one and teach the content of part 2. Attention was given to explaining God is the greatest good, God is the creator, and God is the rule-maker. Consequently, part 2 covers

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<sup>3</sup>A handout used to explain the basic marks of conversion is included in appendix 7.

the topic of humanity. Man is created and the rule-breaker. The discussion of creation is meant to illustrate how far humanity has fallen from God's creation purposes. At this point, parents are instructed to talk graciously and clearly about sin and its causes using examples. Sin is more than breaking God's good rules; sin is turning away from God, who is the greatest good. Repentance, therefore, is returning to God through faith in Christ. At the conclusion of the second meeting I emphasized the importance of parents modeling biblical prayer.

Christ, part 3, was covered in the next meeting. An in-depth discussion of the full deity and humanity of Jesus took up the majority of this class. I affirmed the importance of these truths in a discussion of faith. My goal was to convince parents that faith is not primary; the object of faith is primary. It is crucial for parents to understand why Jesus is the perfect and only Savior. These disciplined parents are thereby equipped to disciple their children. Part three (Christ) is the foundation for part four (Salvation) and therefore needs to be adequately explained.

The fourth meeting covered the topic of salvation under three headings: repentance, faith, and follow. Repentance received a great deal of attention as we studied 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 and discussed how these marks show up in our children. Most parents could affirm worldly grief in their children, but few could attest to godly grief. Talking about godly grief and worldly grief provided the opportunity to encourage some parents to slow down and more adequately explain salvation before pursuing baptism. Identifying Christ crucified as the explicit content of faith also caused some parents to pause. In the pastoral interviews, most of the children readily confessed to faith in God, but few were able to give an age appropriate confession of Jesus as Lord. At this point, Romans 10:9-10 was used to demonstrate that a biblical confession is mark of conversion. Parents were then encouraged to give careful attention to "Day 13: Faith" before discussing it with their children. The class ended before we could sufficiently

discuss faith, so it was reserved for the next meeting.

Faith and baptism made up the content of the fifth meeting. Page 46 of the curriculum was read and discussed in detail so that parents were prepared to lead their children appropriately. We celebrated examples of conviction of sin among some of the children and expressed concern over the lack of desire to know Christ among others. The topic of following Jesus allowed us to examine the importance of Bible reading and prayer in daily life. A brief explanation of Romans 6:1-6 introduced the section on baptism. The sixth and final meeting included a study of 1 Peter 3:18-22 and how it should inform our understanding of baptism. Suggestions were then given for how to make much of baptism. Suggestions included appropriate clothes to wear, how to involve mentors for times of prayer leading up to baptism, how to make it a feast day, and giving meaningful gifts. The class concluded with the final parent survey.

### **Conducting Follow-up Pastoral Interviews**

Follow-up interviews were scheduled with three children due to their continued interest in being baptized. The parents of these children agreed to the next interview, but they were mixed concerning the readiness of the individual children. Some parents believed their children demonstrated the evidence of conversion; other parents were hopeful but unsure. After describing the follow-up interview process with these three children, the plan for the continued teaching and evangelism of the children not interviewed will be presented.

The first follow-up interview was conducted with the boy who was the most nervous of all the children during the initial interview. He was eleven years old. I perceived that meeting at the church building for the first interview increased his anxiety, so I offered to meet with his family at his home. The family graciously agreed to have me over for dinner. We shared in small talk as we waited for the meal, and I asked the first question, “Do you consider yourself to be a Christian and why?” He immediately

responded that he did think he is a Christian, but he could not give a reason for his answer. After a considerable pause, he offered that he is a Christian because he goes to a Christian school. When we returned to the question during the meal, he offered that he is a Christian because he goes to church. At the close of the meal, with a string of leading questions, his dad was able to get him to affirm that it is through personal faith in Jesus Christ that a person is made a Christian.

Early on I realized that the list of questions I had prepared would not be as fruitful as building a relationship with the student and his family. The boy was not comfortable talking about spiritual matters. My goal became to explain my role as a pastor and create rapport. We discussed favorite foods, books, and how his parents met. Spiritual topics included the church's calling to test people's confessions and watch people's lives. I used Jonathan Leeman's embassy illustration and it appeared to help him better understand the church's authority.<sup>4</sup> A church, like an embassy, is empowered to test and affirm citizenship but citizenship comes from the new birth. A Christian must be born again, and the church must seek to affirm the new birth by offering baptism and membership. At the conclusion of the meal it was agreed that we should wait to baptize the student; he was not ready. Moving forward, we made a plan for daily Bible reading and I suggested they read *Pilgrim's Progress*, in today's English, and discuss it together. They committed to do both. After the meal I was able to talk to the boy's father individually. He agreed that his son was not ready to be baptized because of his son's inability to confess Christ as his Savior and Lord. I encouraged him to continue teaching and evangelizing his son.

The second follow-up interview included two children from one family, interviewed separately. Similar to the previous follow-up interview, this interview was

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<sup>4</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 27-30.

conducted in the family's home. The older child, a thirteen-year-old girl, was interviewed first with her parents. Following the initial pastoral interview with her, I agreed with her parents that she was likely ready to be baptized, but it was deemed wise to complete the study to strengthen her beliefs and encourage the parent-child discipling relationship. During the follow-up interview she communicated a biblical understanding of the gospel, personal repentance of sin, explicit faith in Jesus crucified and raised, and knowledge of baptism as a demonstration of one's faith. The particular question related to when she felt close to God proved fruitful for our discussion. She felt close to God when she sings God's praises. We discussed the role of joy in singing and how watching for times when she stopped singing could prove a beneficial check in her spiritual growth. We established a plan for her to confess Christ as Lord and express to the church her desire to be baptized. We would then schedule her baptism. The meeting ended after encouraging her to adopt a daily Bible reading plan.

The next follow-up pastoral interview was with a nine-year-old girl. Her answers were orthodox and exhibited a growing personalization of the gospel compared to her initial interview. She did not understand several of the interview questions which had to be explained before she could answer. This interview, in a particular way, revealed the difficulty of discerning the difference between an orthodox knowledge without regeneration and an orthodox knowledge with the new birth. The new birth, or conversion, certainly includes an orthodox understanding of the gospel, but also includes repentance toward God and faith in Jesus. One of the other parents in the class put this struggle into words, "My child knows all the answers, but it is not easy for me to discern the heart." The interview ended by celebrating what God is doing in this nine-year-old; she will likely be baptized soon. At that moment, her parents and I deemed it wise to encourage her to mature in her understanding of the gospel. They committed to continue with family worship and have regular conversations with her about repentance and faith.

It was determined that the other seven children were not ready for baptism or the follow-up interview. Reasons for not moving forward ranged from a complete lack of interest in spiritual things, to immaturity, to a lack of godly grief. The consensus among the parents was to wait on baptism while continuing to teach and evangelize the children. Multiple options were presented so that parents could choose the means most appropriate for their individual child. These options included utilizing the church's daily Bible reading plan, weekly Bible memory plan, and family worship discussion guides. Families were also encouraged to use Marty Machowski's devotions, *Long Story Short* and *Old Story New*. The church ensures these two resources are always available on the church book rack. Continued participation in Sunday school, the weekly church gathering, and AWANA was also reiterated.

### **Conclusion**

This project was made up of three main parts: writing a curriculum for parents to use when preparing children for baptism, training families to use the curriculum, and interviewing children desirous of baptism. The most time-consuming aspect of the project was writing the curriculum. Aside from writing the curriculum, pastors and parents could easily duplicate the project in other churches. It is my desire that the curriculum, interview practices, and parent training will continue and be improved in the future.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

Thorough evaluation is critical for my future ministry at Mambrino Baptist Church, as well as the increased usefulness of this curriculum for parents and children. Evaluation will begin with the overall purpose of the project then focus on the individual goals of the project. Determining the strengths and weaknesses of the project will provide information for suggested changes for future implementation. The project evaluation will conclude with theological and personal reflections.

#### **Did the Project Fulfill its Purpose?**

The purpose of this project was to develop a baptism preparation curriculum that equips parents and children in Mambrino Baptist Church with a biblical theology of conversion prior to baptism. As indicated by the surveys discussed below, most of the parents involved in this project expressed that they agreed, or even strongly agreed, with the statements “I understand what it means to believe the gospel” and “I understand what it means to be born again or converted.” After completing the project, there was little or no improvement on the parents’ personal understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism. There was significant change, however, relating to the parents’ ability to help their children understand the gospel, conversion, and baptism. This information, discussed in detail below, indicates a level of success.

The final parent survey included five follow-up questions, and six of the twelve parents chose to answer the questions. The first question was “What did you learn about discipling your child by working through this study?” One parent answered, “It

helped me go through more of the aspects of what it means to be a Christian with my child, to make sure he knew what it meant.” The next question was “What did you find helpful about this study?” The same parent answered, “To be able to go in depth [with] the meanings – not just saying ‘ok, you believe let’s get you baptized’ but to walk him through the meanings of what we are.” These statements reveal a common approach to salvation and baptism by some parents in MBC. The general attitude is that if my child believes in Jesus and wants to be baptized, then the child should be baptized. Working through the curriculum, what the Bible says about salvation and baptism, helped equip parents with a biblical theology of conversion. This biblical theology then empowered parents to talk carefully with their children about repentance and faith.

Another purpose of the project was to help determine the readiness of each child for baptism. Of the ten children involved in the project, I determined that one child was ready for baptism, five were close to being ready, and four needed to demonstrate considerable growth in their understanding of the gospel and evidence of conversion before baptism. All five children deemed close to being ready for baptism possessed a knowledge of the facts of the gospel but lacked credible signs of personal faith. These children were able to speak in general terms about Jesus dying because of sin but exhibited little-to-no personal godly grief for their own sin. When I asked these children to explain the various parts of the gospel, they struggled to move beyond a simple recitation of “Christ died for sins.” Studying the differences between godly grief and worldly grief in the parenting class, then using the curriculum to discuss examples of personal sin, parents were equipped to discern more accurately the spiritual condition of their children. Additionally, the pointed discussion questions in the curriculum led some of the children to a more intimate awareness of their sin and need for salvation. The curriculum helped fulfill the purpose of equipping parents and children with a biblical theology of conversion prior to baptism.



Conducting the pastoral interviews contributed to the success of the project because parents were not allowed to answer for their children. In the interviews, the children revealed the presence, or lack of, grief over sin, a personal appreciation of the gospel, a willingness to confess Christ as Lord, and the meaning of baptism. Removing a well-meaning parent's ability to feed answers or ask leading questions helped more accurately identify readiness for baptism. At a basic level, the project was a success because it enabled parents and me, as their pastor, to attain a biblical and more accurate understanding of the spiritual condition of each child. Additionally, working through the curriculum helped establish a discipling relationship in the families.

### **Were the Goals Met?**

The overarching goal of this project was to establish parents and children in the Christian faith. Preparing disciples for baptism provided an opportunity to discern if the new birth had occurred and if the child was therefore eligible for baptism. The first goal of this project was to develop a baptism preparation curriculum which will aid parents and children in their understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism. The second goal of this project was to increase parents' biblical understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism and thereby increase parents' confidence in preparing their children for baptism. The third goal of this project was to increase the baptismal candidates' knowledge of the gospel, conversion, and baptism through parental discipleship.

The first goal was measured by an expert panel of pastors, theologians, and practitioners who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>5</sup> The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or

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<sup>5</sup>The curriculum evaluation rubrics are included in appendix 2.

exceeded the sufficient level. The rubrics contained 40 questions; therefore, only four marks of “requires attention” or “insufficient” would be permissible.

The score from Shelly Melia of Dallas Baptist University was 92.5 percent. Melia marked three areas as requiring attention with no areas labeled as insufficient. The first section needing attention was specific application points for prayer in part 1. Part 4 required attention with symbolic language that could be difficult for young children to understand. Shelly Melia repeated this critique in part 5 indicating that children think literally and the symbolism of baptism, though inescapable, needed attention. Out of a concern for understanding, Shelly Melia noted four verses which might be too hard for children to grasp. Multiple suggestions were offered that simplified the content and encouraged the consistent use of terminology throughout. A repeated suggestion was to improve the emphasis on daily Bible reading. I was glad to incorporate Shelly Melia’s suggestions into the curriculum. I did not change any of the verses or symbolic references but sought to clarify the content.

The score from William Cook of Southern Seminary was 100 percent with all areas of the curriculum being sufficient or exemplary. Consistently, William Cook marked each unit as merely sufficient concerning the age appropriateness of the material. In light of Shelly Melia’s similar critique, it is necessary to work back through the curriculum to simplify the content as much as possible. The first goal of writing a baptism preparation curriculum that helps parents and children understand the gospel, conversion, and baptism was successfully met.

The second goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey that gauged the parents’ level of knowledge and confidence to help their children understand the gospel, conversion, and baptism. This goal was considered successfully met when t-test dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores among parents. Eight parents completed both pre- and post-

surveys. One parent did not complete the final survey for unknown reasons. The two remaining participants did not complete the class and therefore did not complete the survey. This couple decided to wait for their children to mature and join the class when it is repeated in the future. The results of the parent surveys provided a helpful evaluation of the project.

The survey was made up of six questions designed to identify the parents' understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism. Beyond a personal knowledge, the survey sought to gauge the parents' confidence disciplining their children. When the survey is viewed holistically, the t-test does not reveal a statistically significant increase in knowledge.

Table 1. T-test for all questions

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>PRE-TEST TOTAL</i>	<i>POST-TEST- TOTAL</i>
Mean	30.125	33
Variance	18.98214286	15.71428571
Observations	8	8
Pearson Correlation	0.636902192	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	7	
t Stat	-2.282138805	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.028228986	
t Critical one-tail	1.894578605	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.056457972	
t Critical two-tail	2.364624252	

While there is a slight increase in the mean scores, the t Critical two-tail total is greater than the t Stat and the P two-tail result is slightly greater than .05. Two insights are helpful on this point. First, during one of the final interviews I explained that the

questions I asked the child are questions that every new member had to answer. I emphasized that the child's parents had to be able to explain the gospel, explain how they came to believe the gospel, and give evidence of biblical baptism. Every parent involved in the project was a member of the church and had therefore completed the new member class where the gospel, conversion, and baptism were taught. Additionally, every parent had discussed these topics with an elder prior to becoming a member. It would be interesting to be able to compare the same survey with parents from StoneWater church to discover if there is any significant connection between MBC's commitment to teaching a biblical understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism as well as the parents' understanding of these elements.

A second insight regarding the lack of overall significant change relates to one parent's pre- and post-survey. This parent noted "strongly agree" to understanding the gospel, conversion, and baptism on the pre-test. On the post-test, however, this same parent answered "agree" to the same questions. This is a decrease after the class and completing the curriculum. There are various hypothetical answers explaining this decrease. One cause could be that the class and curriculum confused the parent. Another cause in the marked decrease in understanding could be overconfidence. Originally, the parent was sure of his/her understanding, but considerable work studying the gospel may have revealed previously unseen weaknesses. Additionally, the surveys were anonymous but turned in directly to me. Parents could have been tempted to answer high on the first three questions to avoid looking ignorant in front of their pastor. If repeated, the surveys should be more carefully worded and submitted in an absolutely anonymous format.

Considered as a whole, the t Critical two-tail test did not reveal a statistically significant increase in knowledge. However, when the questions addressing the parents' ability to teach their children are analyzed separately, there is a statistically significant increase in knowledge. These are the results of the three questions concerning the

parents' acuity in relation to discipling their children.

Table 2. T-test for parenting questions

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>PRE-TEST TOTAL</i>	<i>POST-TEST- TOTAL</i>
Mean	13.625	16
Variance	7.696428571	6.285714286
Observations	8	8
Pearson Correlation	0.698327166	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	7	
t Stat	-3.251649083	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.007012639	
t Critical one-tail	1.894578605	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.014025278	
t Critical two-tail	2.364624252	

Note the increase in the mean scores (13.625 to 16), the t Critical two-tail total (2.36462) is smaller than the t Stat absolute value (3.25164), and the P two-tail total (0.01402) is less than .05. These results demonstrate with 95 percent confidence that the teaching targeted at helping parents disciple their children did make a statistically significant difference.

While the parents' understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism did not increase, the parents' confidence regarding helping their children understand the gospel, conversion, and baptism did increase. The discussion questions on the final parent survey revealed additional factors contributing to the increase in the parents' confidence. I asked parents to identify what they found helpful about the curriculum and what they found helpful about the class. One parent compared the class to the help received in pre-marital counseling. The parent felt empowered to disciple his/her child because the

content of the faith, the biblical marks of conversion, and what we believe about baptism were clearly defined and carefully discussed. The same parent appreciated that the study involved the parents in the discipleship process instead of “leaving it up to the church.” Another parent commented that it was helpful to work through the material beforehand as a group. During each meeting I tried to ask the parents how the previous week had gone. Often a parent would bring up a struggle he/she had experienced while teaching his/her child. The other parents would then quickly voice that they were experiencing the same struggle. This comradery encouraged the parents and led to fruitful conversations.

A common topic for discussion was voiced by one parent in the final survey: “My child knows all the answers, but it is not easy for me to discern the heart.” A similar sentiment involved concern over children repenting of sin because they wanted to get out of trouble instead of repenting because of godly grief. Examining these matters in light of the Bible’s instructions on the heart and true repentance seemed to free parents from a sense of guilt for not wanting to immediately baptize their children. Identifying the biblical marks of conversion helped move parents from a subjective interpretation of their child’s conversion to a more objective position. This progression in biblical thinking about conversion, verified by the statistical information, points toward the fulfillment of goal number two.

The third goal was measured by interviewing the children before the curriculum was started and after it was completed. This goal was considered successfully met when the interviews were analyzed yielding an accurate appraisal of the spiritual condition of, and the next appropriate step for, the child seeking baptism. As mentioned above, of the ten children in the project, one was scheduled for baptism, five were considered close to being ready, and four needed to demonstrate considerable development in their ability to explain the gospel and give evidence of repentance and faith. Combining the curriculum with the interviews provided a more accurate

understanding of the child's spiritual condition.

Concerning a proper evaluation, it must be stated that there is a subjective element in determining a child's conversion and therefore readiness for baptism. Factors such as cognitive development, personality, and a desire to please both parent and pastor affect a child's confession of Christ. Dennis Gunderson cautions parents of children seeking baptism because of the intellectual immaturity of children. Gunderson notes that children tend to speak less maturely than most adults, think less maturely than most adults, and a child's reasoning skills are less mature than most adults.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, it is deemed wise for parents and pastors to be careful when confirming a child's early confession of faith. On the other hand, pastors and parents must also be careful not to set the standards for conversion at a level impossible for children. Equipping parents with a biblical theology of conversion and interviewing children desirous of baptism help provide a more robust consideration of the child's conversion.

### **What Were the Strengths of the Project?**

The strengths of the project will be identified in relation to the curriculum, the course, and the interviews. In the post-survey, parents were asked to describe what they found helpful about the course and material. Parents noted that the curriculum possessed "good organization and flow," and "good imagery." Another parent commented that one benefit was the utilization of "simple words for children to understand." One overall strength, therefore, is how the curriculum explains the gospel, conversion, and baptism on a child's level and in an organized way.

Outside of the organization of the material and age-appropriate explanations, the curriculum provided structure for a parent to disciple his/her child. One parent

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<sup>6</sup>Dennis, Gunderson, *Your Child's Profession of Faith* (Sand Springs, OK: Grace and Truth Book, 2010), 31.

celebrated by saying, “One on one time with each child was great.” Another parent appreciated how the material and outline provided “sound bites to talk with my kids throughout the day.” It appears that these parents at MBC have a biblical understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism but do not know how to pass this knowledge on to their children. Offering structure, material, and accountability was a strength of the project.

In the past, I offered the early drafts of the material to parents to use at their own pace and without formal training. The completion rate for these parents was significantly lower than those parents involved in this project. There were multiple reasons for the increased completion rate. One factor was the expectation of participants to finish the material week by week. The schedule encouraged parents to stay on pace teaching their children what they had just learned in the class. Completing the material alongside other parents also helped to create community and provide encouragement. A parent wrote, “It was good to discuss with the group and find we had similar experiences” and “As a group, we are able to bring up more discussions [instead of] going through it alone.” Parents were constantly discussing the ways their children were growing and how to address the complex issue of conversion. Together, parents shared advice and prayed for one another. These quotations illustrate how equipping parents to fulfill their roles as primary disciple-makers benefits the family and other families in the church. The value of bringing families together to help one another cannot be underestimated.

A further strength of the project comes from the structure and content of the curriculum. One parent commented, “This study provided a roadmap to my heart as well as to my child.” Another parent wrote, “It helped me to see where my weaknesses are, in how to better communicate the gospel.” The curriculum was written with the goal of being thorough. Parents appreciated how the curriculum provided questions that led the discussions of the gospel, conversion, and baptism. A parent stated, “I learned that it is



better to ask open ended questions and what to listen for in my children.” Similarly, another parent affirmed, “I found having questions scripted. . . helpful because they were the right questions to get where we needed to go.” Many teachers can testify that mastering a topic is one thing, while teaching a person how to master the same topic is a whole other matter. A strength of this curriculum was that it provided biblical content and discussion questions to help parents pass on a biblical theology of conversion and baptism to their children.

Concerning the course, a strength of the project was that it provided dedicated time for parents to process the content of the curriculum prior to teaching their children. Most of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements “I understand what it means to believe the gospel,” “I understand what it means to be born again,” and “I understand believer’s baptism.” As attested above, these same parents were not as confident teaching these truths to their children. Where the curriculum started the conversations between parent and child, the course provided a space for parents to process what their children were saying and gain wisdom for future conversations. During the class, parents would respond to one another with, “I never thought about that” or “I think what you did with your child will help my child.” In a day when good information is readily available but opportunities to personalize and apply that information are scarce, having parents teach the curriculum while taking the course proved helpful.

One final strength of the project relates to the pastoral interviews. In Acts 20:28, the elders of the church in Ephesus were told, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” Hebrews 13:17 tells members, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” Part of a pastor’s role is to pay careful attention

to the members and keep diligent watch on the spiritual health of the members. This duty is fulfilled first by the regular and faithful preaching of God's Word. This duty is fulfilled second by the regular and faithful care for souls through pastoral visits. Requiring two interviews encouraged me to meet with families and spend dedicated time talking about the spiritual condition of the children. Time will ultimately tell, but my hope is that these pastoral interviews will help strengthen my pastoral relationship with these individuals and families.

### **What Were the Weaknesses of the Project?**

While there were several strengths to the project, there were also multiple weaknesses. As mentioned above, the curriculum is thorough, which for some parents translated as too long. One of the questions on the final parent survey was "What would make this study more beneficial for parents and children in the future?" One parent's advice was simple: "shorter." Eighteen conversations, ranging from 10-20 minutes each, can be overwhelming for some parents. A 2017 poll of 2000 parents in the United Kingdom revealed that the average amount of time parents spend in daily conversation with their children is 44 minutes.<sup>7</sup> These 44 minutes are divided along the lines of 9 minutes before school, 14 minutes after school, 11 minutes over dinner, and 10 minutes at bedtime. In relation to this study, asking parents to have one 20-minute conversation is asking something unusual. Requiring eighteen 10 to 20-minute conversations could appear impossible to some parents. When I set out to write this curriculum, my initial plan was much more involved than the final five unit Bible study. The balance between thoroughness and accessibility was difficult to maintain. Looking back over the years of use, it is clear that parents are more likely to finish the study if they are held accountable

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<sup>7</sup>Express, "You'll Never Guess How Many Minutes Parents Talk to Their Children Each Day," accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/life/827783/Parents-Britain-talk-children-parenting-research>.

by the pace of the class and the example of their peers. One of the weaknesses, therefore, is the length of the material. This weakness can be overcome by pastoral leadership and the encouragement of other parents.

Interestingly, one parent suggested that five weeks was too short. For this parent, the curriculum was not too long; instead, the time frame for teaching the curriculum was insufficient. This parent commented, “Five weeks was too short because it was hard to add in to my family and schedule.” Similarly, another parent suggested, “We need more time to review the child’s thoughts and beliefs.” For these parents, the amount of content, already existing commitments, and time to process what is happening required more time than five weeks. The course itself fell near the end of the school year. One family had a child graduating from high school and other families felt the pressure of end-of-year commitments. One of the families, who discerned their child was not ready for baptism, committed to learning the content in the five-week class but teaching it at a much slower rate, possibly one lesson a week, during the summer break. A potential weakness of the curriculum is it requires already committed parents to make an additional commitment. Unfortunately, some parents will not follow through because of the length of the material or the amount of material covered in a week. Others may not complete the study because evangelism and discipleship are not priorities. Addressing this weakness requires another careful review of the curriculum to remove unnecessary information. Alongside this solution is careful planning of the course in relation to school and holiday calendars. Finally, parents need to be taught and encouraged to disciple their children. The curriculum by itself is insufficient. Most parents need pastors and peers who will encourage them to teach their children.

Concerning the course itself, an additional weakness of the project is the first meeting had too much information. I told parents we would have five meetings which would prepare them to discuss the five units of the curriculum with their children. Due to

absences, we met for six weeks. The first meeting necessarily included an introduction to the biblical marks of conversion, an overview of the curriculum, how to use the curriculum, and the content of unit one. By the time the marks of conversion were discussed there was little time for the remaining content. Looking to future implementation, there needs to be an initial meeting which will explain the marks of conversion and how to use the curriculum. The second meeting can then be devoted to teaching the content of lesson one.

An ancillary goal of the project was to encourage the practice of daily Bible reading. Unfortunately, none of the parents in the course successfully implemented this spiritual discipline. In fact, few mentioned even attempting to establish the habit. Questions about daily Bible reading on the parent surveys could be a source of helpful information in the future. Concerning the project, I believe the weakness of a lack of daily Bible reading is related to inadequate explanation of its necessity. We clarified the need for those being baptized to understand the gospel and be converted. We did not, however, prove the importance of regular Bible reading. Contributing to this weakness is the neglect of the first sheet of each unit and lesson. Each lesson begins with a discussion question concerning the previous day's Bible reading. Scripture memory and the gospel outline are also emphasized. I never asked parents how this aspect of the curriculum was going with their children. Since I did not value this part of the curriculum with the parents, it was natural for the parents to devalue it with their children. Providing more time and direction concerning daily Bible reading, weekly Scripture memory, and memorization of the gospel outline would be beneficial.

A final weakness of the project was a lack of direction for those families whose child was not ready for baptism. While materials were listed with the curriculum, and individual suggestions were offered, I did not check in with those families to encourage

continuing evangelism. Further pastoral leadership was required. These weaknesses prove the need for changes before future implementation of the project.

### **Changes for Future Implementation**

Having provided some suggested improvements above, I will provide a brief summary here and offer a few additional changes. While the curriculum met the 90% requirement for the expert panel and did not demand changes, there were a few suggestions given which I have followed. These changes were mainly stylistic and focused on simplifying some of the language and more carefully explaining the symbol of baptism on an age-appropriate level. The language of the curriculum needs to be simplified before the next use, and daily Bible reading should receive more emphasis.

Offering the curriculum to parents as a part of MBC's Sunday school plan will require changes in recruiting. For this project, the basic information was shared in a timely fashion through the bulletin and personal invites. Improvements need to be made in the area of encouraging parents to fill their role as primary disciple-makers during the recruitment. Some parents have already come to adopt their position of spiritual influence in their children's lives. Other parents need to be encouraged and equipped to fill this role. Recruiting in the future must include the biblical command for parents to disciple their children along with the desire of the pastors to equip parents to fill that position.

As mentioned above, improvements need to be made to the schedule. The course should be six weeks long providing adequate time to introduce the marks of conversion and how to use the curriculum. The timing of the course should also be considered so as not to overwhelm parents around the start of school, the end of school, or holidays. Daily Bible reading, scripture memory, and committing the gospel outline to memory need to be better emphasized. There are numerous weaknesses of the project, and several changes need to be made for the future. The duty of pastors to equip parents and the command for parents to teach their children provide adequate reasons to make

these improvements.

### **Theological Reflection**

The exegetical work, writing the curriculum, and teaching the class to parents raised several theological issues. One of the regular discussions dealt with the issue of immediate baptisms. A common objection to using baptism preparation curriculum generally started with the affirmation that confessors were immediately baptized in the book of Acts. While I do not disagree with the claim that baptisms in Acts were immediate, I disagree with those who would therefore require immediate baptisms. Basically, the time between the confession and the confessor's baptism should be determined by the church as it examines readiness for baptism. When an adult or child demonstrates personal appreciation of the gospel, repentance and faith, and a right understanding of baptism, then that adult or child should be baptized.

Similar to immediate baptisms, a theological question dealt with what is required by Scripture for baptism. Does the Bible mandate evidence of a personal appreciation of the gospel, evidence of repentance, and evidence of a proper understanding of baptism? Romans 10:10 would be quoted to rebut these requirements, and opponents would seek to establish only belief in the heart and a confession of Christ with the lips. Accordingly, a child need only believe in Jesus and confess Jesus as Lord to be baptized. My response was, and continues to be, that Romans 10:10 is the product of Romans 1-10:9. Belief in the heart for justification and the meaning of confessing Jesus as Lord are robust requirements which must be considered in light of the entire book of Romans, not a simplistic reading of one verse apart from its context. My requirement of a personal appropriation of the gospel, evidence of repentance and faith, and a biblical understanding of baptism are fair and biblical requirements for all those seeking baptism.

Reading Dennis Gunderson's book and looking into church practice among Reformed Baptists caused me to reflect on the validity of a minimum age for baptism. Is

a particular age required, recommended, or ridiculous? There appears to be no biblical warrant for a required minimum age, and while parents or pastors might say recommending children wait to be baptized is ridiculous, I see the wisdom in recommending a child wait until around age 10 before being baptized. Some children will be saved and give evidence of repentance and faith earlier; this should not be ruled out. However, young children are often eager to please their parents and generally believe whatever trusted authorities tell them. This amicableness is a blessing but also should cause some level of care when considering the baptism of a young child. Is the child's confession the product of conversion and a personal appropriation of the gospel, or is the child's confession the product of the simple ability to memorize facts? By age 10, children are often capable of abstract thought and can grasp what is happening in baptism with greater clarity and joy. I need to do more work on this subject, but it initially appears wise to recommend, but not require, that children wait until the age of 10 to be baptized.

Outside of issues concerning baptismal practices, this project has revealed God's manifold wisdom in providing the family and the church for the good of the disciple. Repeatedly, I saw the blessing of parents investing considerable energy into teaching the truth to their children. Also repeatedly, I saw the need of the church to equip parents to do this work. It has been a joy to hear parents talk about the spiritual growth of their children. Praying with parents as they plead for the salvation of their children, wisdom to teach, and strength to keep the right priorities sobered the whole group. We experienced the joys of parenting and the good of church membership in our time together. Equipping parents to lead out in this growth was humbling as more parents accepted their place as primary disciple-makers. God ordained the family, and we experienced the blessing of bringing children up according to the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). God also ordained the church, and we benefited from helping one another follow Jesus fulfilling our role as parents (Eph 4:11-16). God has

been gracious to allow me to write this curriculum, and God showed considerable kindness in the composition of the devoted parents in our group.

I attended a baptism service for another church in the middle of the weeks spent writing this chapter. That church baptized more people that night than MBC has baptized in the fourteen years I have pastored it. During the service I heard two statements among the prevalent joy and right celebration. First, there were the apologies for, or regret over, the chaos of the evening. Baptisms were performed simultaneously and were fed by two lines on the city beach. There were two stages in each line. The one being baptized would hand a sheet of paper to a baptism team leader who read out loud a one or two sentence testimony. This would rightly cause clapping and shouting. While this happened on the shore, a person was being baptized in the water, which would also rightly elicit loud celebrations. Two lines of people produced constant testimonies, celebrations, baptisms, and shouts. It was hard to follow what was happening. After statements concerning “the chaos” were statements about baptism being “only a sign.” The sentiment was that the important stuff had already happened, and baptism was necessary only because Jesus did it and commanded it. To be fair, the sense of celebration was tangible, but I left wondering why we were celebrating the baptismal candidates getting wet but not their fellow beach-goers only a few feet away. Restoring baptism to its proper place in the life of every believer is difficult. It is easier to make baptism next to nothing or pretty much everything. As a pastor, I have much work to do concerning the proper understanding and practice of baptism. I thank God for what he has taught me and allowed me to do through this project.

### **Personal Reflection**

I have learned a great deal about myself and my own temptations in ministry by completing this project. When filling out the ethics forms for the seminary, I was surprised to see that my project required a level-two clearance. Then I remembered that



part of my project potentially involved having to tell parents that their children should not be baptized. I would be confronted with the pastoral duty of refusing baptism though the child and parent thought it was appropriate. The fear of man, the fear of telling people no, was a struggle, particularly during the follow-up pastoral interviews. Hebrews 13:17 would regularly sober my thinking. I will give an account for these souls. God expects pastors to lead the church to baptize only disciples. Was I right in refusing those I refused and affirming the one I affirmed? My convictions concerning my role as a pastor and the biblical requirements for baptism helped guide me through fears and toward a more faithful approach to baptism.

Exegeting passages, writing the curriculum, teaching parents, and meeting with families demonstrated the need to discipline myself constantly for godliness. I was regularly tempted to give my attention to other things, and I often stumbled and wasted time. Instead of delegating non-pastoral tasks so I could focus on studying the Word or equipping parents, I would spend hours doing things better suited for other church members. Reflecting on this trend, I see how I am drawn to projects that are easily accomplished or will likely cause members to appreciate me. Multiplying ministry at MBC requires that I focus on those things I should be doing while carefully training members and delegating responsibilities. I must discipline myself for godliness.

Another temptation I face is the danger of defending my project instead of always seeking to be reformed by Scripture. I have felt the pull to defend my project instead of carefully listening to those who raise concerns. Additionally, the desire to use the curriculum in the future here at MBC, and hopefully among other churches, stokes my pride. Dennis Gunderson's question about future publishing and the encouragement of my peers to share it with others is simultaneously an encouragement and a temptation. I want to make a name for myself, but if I seek the glory that comes from man I will cut myself off from the glory that comes from the only God (John 5:44). I must seek first

God's kingdom and leave the results to him. I must pursue humility and continually allow Scripture to reform my theology and practice.

Great benefits have come alongside these temptations. Piloting the project with another church in town has strengthened my relationship with the pastors there. I hope this liaison will open the door for increased cooperation with other local churches. The intentional study of baptism has increased my appreciation for the ordinance. In the past, where I used to stumble to find the words of explanation or hesitate with my application of doctrine, I have now found increased confidence and ability as a pastor. Having gained some clarity, I am better able to help those being baptized to view all the aspects of baptism through a biblical lens of faith. Running the project with families has created new relationships with church members and deepened existing relationships. While working on this project, an adult and an older teenager have come seeking baptism. Applying what I have learned through this project to those men has been a joy. A final benefit of the project has been the necessary inspection of my own parenting and disciple-making. I experienced conviction over my own insufficient practice of family worship and the need to prepare my children for baptism. I have much to learn, and I am excited about the continuing fruitfulness of this project among the people of Mambrino Baptist Church.

### **Conclusion**

Personally, this project has been a success as it helped strengthen my understanding of baptism and encouraged me to fulfill my calling as a pastor more faithfully. The achievement of the project goals was mixed since I did not improve the parents' understanding of the gospel, conversion, and baptism but did increase their confidence as disciple-makers. The curriculum was tried, improved, critiqued, and reformed so that it now stands as a helpful resource for use in the future. Pastorally, I have gained skills and experience that will help me be a more faithful pastor in the future.

Overall, my hope is that I am a more Christ-like man and the church will be built up by this project.

APPENDIX 1  
BAPTISM PREPARATION CURRICULUM

## **A Note to Parents**

Jesus' instructions are clear, "Go...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 observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20a). Every Christian has been given the awesome calling to make disciples, and a disciple is a baptized follower of Jesus. If you are reading this, then most likely a child in your family or church has expressed a desire to be baptized. My goal is to equip you to disciple your child to obey Jesus' command to be baptized. I also want to help you understand from a biblical perspective if your child is ready for baptism. As you work together, you may find out your child is not ready. We have a plan for that too. Together, we will establish lifelong habits by which each of you can live a disciple who make disciples.

Here are some pointers as you get started.

### **Remember, you are the primary influence on your child, so be genuine.**

- Deuteronomy 6 gives you instructions for being the person your child needs, and Deuteronomy 6 gives you a helpful structure for being a godly influence on your child. Spend some time prayerfully reading Deuteronomy 6 and thinking through how you can be a more godly influence on your child.

After reading Deuteronomy 6, I need to

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### **Be quick to listen and slow to speak.**

- Encourage your child to be genuine. Teach in a way that your child personally owns the truth. Be intentional to talk through the lessons not just get them done. As you teach, be careful not to answer the questions for your child. Make sure you have plenty of time and encourage your child to talk.

### **Be diligent with the memory work.**

- The goal is mastery not completion. You'll need to memorize the verses and gospel outline so that you can work the truths into all aspects of life with your child (see Deuteronomy 6). Make note cards. Use a dry erase board. If you don't have a dry erase board you can use a dry erase marker on a window or mirror (test it first).

### **Enjoy Christ with your child.**

- You need Christ as much as your child. Be intentional to bless your child by showing him/her how to delight in the forgiveness of sins and the glory of God's Son. Campout on truths that get you excited. If you feel like your child has lost interest, then stop and come back later.

**Pray with and for your child.**

- There are helps at the end of each day for you to pray with your child. Take the lead in modeling a healthy prayer life by praying Scripture. Encourage your child to pray out loud and share ways your child can pray for you.

**Encourage your child to make disciples.**

- Look for opportunities to help your disciple share what is being learned. The dinner table is a great place to share a testimony or biblical truth. Start with siblings and relatives. Have church members in your home and involve your child in the conversation. Talk to your pastors about how you and your child can help another person who is preparing for baptism.

**Work ahead and ask for help.**

- As parents, we don't need to know everything. We just need to stay one step ahead. If you are going to work with your child at night, then read through the study in the morning. Pray constantly for God's help. If you don't understand something, please ask. Connect with another parent going through the study. Connect with your pastors. If your child asks a question that you cannot answer, then tell him/her you don't know but you'll find out. Then go find the answer. God has placed you in a church so you can help others and be helped by others. Use that blessing.

**Find a place and make discipleship a priority.**

- Discipling your child is an amazing blessing that takes time and requires prioritization. It can be helpful to choose a set place where the two of you can meet each day. There is also a benefit to putting the time you will meet on your calendar. Communicate with the rest of your family so they can protect the time and encourage you to keep meeting. When you meet, simply work through the material. Start at the top of the sheet each day and work through to the closing prayer. Basically, just start. It will make sense as you go, and your pastors are more than willing to help.

**Here we go.....**

# The Big Picture

By the end of this study both of you should be able to say this outline from memory and explain each point from the Bible. As you do life each day, ask your child questions from the outline like, “Who is God?”. Encourage your child to answer from the bible study and then look for a personal explanation demonstrating your child has understanding.

Memorize the biblical truths and help your child apply those truth to life. Here is an example. You ask, “Who is God?” Your child responds, “God is the Greatest Good, Creator and Rule Maker. That means God is better than everything, He made me, and gives me His good rules for life.”

## God

- The Greatest Good
- Creator
- Rule Maker

## Man

- Created
- Rule Breaker

## Christ

- The God-Man
- Rule Keeper
- Punishment Taker
- The Way back to God

## Salvation

- New Creation
- Repent
- Faith
- Follow

## Baptism

- Funeral and a Birthday Party

*Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from the English Standard Version.*

# **God- Part 1**

**Big Idea:** God is the Greatest Good, Creator, and Rule Maker.

**Memory Verse:** “A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” (Psalm 84:10)

Use this page to practice writing the memory verse or draw a picture that illustrates the memory verse.



## Day 1: God the Greatest-Good

Work on memorizing Psalm 84:10 and the Big Idea together.

**Memory Verse:** “A day in your courts is \_\_\_\_\_ than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” (Psalm 84:10)

**Big Idea:** God is the \_\_\_\_\_, Creator, and Rule-Maker

**Today’s Main Point: God is best.**

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*How this works* (Parent read out loud)

We are going to work through each day’s lesson in one sitting. Every day we will look at the Bible together and take turns reading the Bible verses out loud. After the verses, there is a quick explanation and a few questions to help us understand what the verses mean. Don’t rush. The goal is to understand it, not simply get through it. Please ask lots of questions.

*What does the Bible say?* (Child read out)

- Psalm 84:10, “A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

Want to go further? Read Psalm 16:11 and Psalm 27:4

*What does that mean?* (Child read out loud)

God is the greatest good. Being with God is better than being with anyone else. Being with God is better than being anywhere else. Right now, it may be hard to believe that being with God is better than being with your best friend or being at your favorite place. Part of what it means to be a Christian is seeing the value and glory of God. We’ll talk more about this in days ahead. For now, go back and read Psalm 84:10 out loud.

**TRUTH: God is better.**

*TALK About It* (Parent, you ask the questions)

- Who is your favorite person? What do you like about him/her?
- What is your favorite place? What do you like about being there?
- A day with God is better than 1,000 days being in your favorite place. What must God be like if one day with him is better than 1,000 days elsewhere?

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- Philippians 3:8, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”

Want to go further? Read Matthew 13:44 and watch “Hidden Treasure” from Modern Parables on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/8249380>).

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Knowing and enjoying God depends on knowing Jesus Christ. In Philippians 3:8, the apostle Paul tells us that he has experienced the best stuff out there and the best stuff is like trash compared to knowing Jesus Christ. Like a coach pleading with you to do everything you can to win, the apostle Paul is pleading with us to do everything we can to see and enjoy Jesus.

*TALK About It (Parent, you ask the questions)*

- What do you think about what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:8?
  - *Parent, this is an open-ended question. Each day you want to help your child see that trusting Jesus means personally owning who He is and what He has done so that your child can be restored to God. Does your child have a desire to know God? Does your child feel badly when he/she sins? Can your child explain the biblical basics of the gospel? This study will help you teach these things. Pray for the Holy Spirit to apply these truths to your child’s heart.*
- Who is Jesus?
  - *Parent, the Bible tells us that Jesus is fully God and fully man so that He can obey God’s laws for us and be a sufficient (better than good-enough) sacrifice for our sins. Help your child understand that Jesus came to remove your child’s sins so that your child can be restored to God. If this is new, keep working, we’ll explain this more in days to come.*
- Why is gaining Jesus the best thing that can happen to you?
  - *Parent, God is the greatest good, our sin separates us from God, and Jesus is the only way to the Father. Jesus gives us God!*

*PRAY Together*

Each day there will be a “prayer starter” for you to use. Read the whole prayer and talk about any questions you have. You can pray the prayer word-for-word or you can use your own words. The important thing is to learn how to pray according to God’s Word.

*God, You tell me that You are better than everything. I see in the Bible that You are the greatest good. This can be hard for me to understand. A lot of times I love other things more than You. Please forgive me. Help me to see and enjoy Your goodness.*

*Help me to see how much I need Jesus. Thank you for teaching me. Help me to be grateful for all things and help me to love You more than all things.*

Good job! You've got the hang of it now. Choose your next meeting time and place. Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time

\_\_\_\_\_.

Part of this study is building healthy habits for continuing spiritual growth. One crucial part of spiritual growth is reading God's Word. Commit to reading one chapter of Mark's gospel as you continue to work through this study. If you meet in the evening, then each of you, individually and on your own, can read a chapter of Mark's gospel in the morning. If you meet in the morning, then read a chapter of Mark before bed each night. Start the healthy habit of daily Bible reading.

## Day 2: God the Creator

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 1)?*

*Work on memorizing Psalm 84:10 and the Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** “A day in your courts is \_\_\_\_\_ than a thousand elsewhere.  
\_\_\_\_\_ a doorkeeper in the house of my God than  
dwell in the tents of wickedness.” (Psalm 84:10)

**Big Idea:** God is the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and Rule-Maker

**Main Point: God made everything, and everything He made was good.**

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*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **God made it all:** “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)
- **God made it all good:** “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

In the beginning there were no tears or sadness or hurts. There was no death or fighting; only good. People loved God, and they loved one another. People worked hard, and they enjoyed their work. There was nothing to fear, and everything was good. Broccoli tasted great, and no one ever needed to be grounded or sit in time out. In the beginning everything was perfect, everyone obeyed God, and everyone was happy.

*What happened? (Child read out loud)*

A problem started when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Jeremiah 2:12-13 helps us understand what went wrong. “Be appalled O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”<sup>8</sup>

*TALK About It: (Parent ask)*

- What is a cistern and why are they so important? (Parents, you may want to Google an image of a cistern)
- \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>8</sup>Parent be sure to define any words that are unclear to your child.

- *Cisterns were places to store water. If you didn't have a cistern to store water, then you would be thirsty all the time. You and your animals could die.*
- What two things did the people do wrong according to Jeremiah 2:12-13?
  - *The people forgot, or turned away from, God. The people tried to make themselves happy without God (they hewed out cisterns that can't hold water).*
- In what ways do you try to make yourself happy without God? Both of you, give specific examples.
  - *Examples can be disobeying parents, fighting with brothers or sisters, stealing, lying, or being lazy. Parent, does your child have an awareness of his/her sin?*

*REVIEW today's Main Point. (Parent, have your child fill in the blanks)*

God made \_\_\_\_\_, and everything He made was \_\_\_\_\_.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **God personally made mankind:** “The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7)
- **God personally made me:** “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful. I know that full well.” (Psalm 139:13-14)

*What does that mean?*

- PARENT read, “King David, Israel’s greatest king, wrote Psalm 139. Who was he talking to in verses 13-14?” HINT: Find and read v.1.
- PARENT ask, “Who made you?”
- PARENT ask, “Did God mess up when He made you?”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Parents take some time here to celebrate your child; in doing so you are affirming that God is a wonderful Maker, and as a wonderful Maker He makes good things. Make the commitment today to tell your child that you are thankful to God for him/her. Let your child know you think God did a great job making him/her. I try to regularly tell my children that I am thankful God gave them to me. I say it to them all together, and I say it to them each individually. It is also good to celebrate the fact that God made your son a boy and your daughter a girl. Randy Stinson gave the helpful advice of telling your son you are glad God made him a boy and tell your son specific ways he does the “boy thing” well. Likewise, tell your daughter you are glad God made her a girl and tell her specific ways she does the “girl thing” well. Your child is fearfully and wonderfully made. Make sure he/she knows it.

- CHILD ask, “Who made you?”
- CHILD ask, “Did God know what He was doing when He made you?”

Parent read:

**TRUTH: As God is Creator of all things, He is also Owner of all things.**

If you bake a batch of cookies, those cookies belong to you. If you make a fort, you have the right to call it your own. You made each of them. You have the right to give the cookies away, sell them, or enjoy them yourself. You have the right to decide who can come into your fort and what will happen inside your fort. Because you made those things you control those things.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- Where did you get the ingredients and materials to make the cookies or the fort?
  - *We buy these from the store.*
- How did you get the money to buy those things?
  - *We get jobs and go to work to make a paycheck.*
- Who gives us the ability to work and earn pay?
  - *God gives us the ability to work and earn money.*
- Where did the store get the ingredients or materials?
  - *These things must be grown or made.*
- Who made the materials grow on the land or who put the materials in the ground?
  - *God did.*
- Explain what this means: since God created everything He has the right to control everything.
  - *God is the maker and owner of all things and every person. He gets to make the rules.*
- Since God created you, are you in charge of God or is God in charge of you?

*PRAY Together*

*God, thank you for all the good things you have made. You are good and everything you made is good. Forgive me for taking those good things and doing bad things with them. Forgive me for trying to make myself happy without you. Thank you for sending Jesus so I can be forgiven and made right with you. God, you are the greatest good. Thank you for showing me that truth.*

Choose your next meeting time and place. Read Mark 2 before your next meeting.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## Day 3: God the Rule-Maker

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 2)?*

*Work on memorizing Psalm 84:10 and the Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** “A day in \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ than a thousand \_\_\_\_\_. I \_\_\_\_\_ a doorkeeper in the house of \_\_\_\_\_ than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

(Psalm 84:10)

**Big Idea:** God is the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_

**Main Point: God made you to love Him and He gave you His good rules.**

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*Parent read out loud:* “Remember, God is in charge. He made everything, including you. Because He made you, He has the right to do whatever He wants with you. You are His creation!”

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **A very important question:** “How can a young man keep his way pure?” (Psalm 119:9a)
- **A life-changing answer:** “By living according to [God’s] word.” (Psalm 119:9b)

*What does that mean? (Child read out loud)*

Since God made the world, God knows how the world and everything in it should work. The Bible is God’s instruction book teaching us how we ought to live.

**IMAGINE:** What if we didn’t have any labels? (*Parent read out loud*)

Imagine going to the grocery store and all the liquids were in unmarked bottles on the same shelf in the store. Apple juice, which is good to drink, would be right beside gasoline, which can kill you if you drink it. The two bottles might look exactly alike. How would we know the difference? The labels tell us the difference.

Imagine now that you have a craving for Mountain Dew. You are in your local grocery store, which has decided to save some money by putting each liquid in identical containers...and they never bothered to get around to labeling them. You see a row of liquids. The bottle with green liquid may, in fact, be Mountain Dew. But it may also be poisonous green engine coolant. Does it sound like a good idea to go ahead and take a drink to figure out what the liquid is? (Please answer, “NO!” to

that. Thanks.) When a company puts a warning label on a product, they do it to keep us safe. When we use something for its intended purpose, then things work out. When we use engine coolant to quench our thirst, we threaten our very lives.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- What other things can you think of that—if used the wrong way—can be dangerous?
  - Fireworks, Drano, guns, power tools
- Think about your heart (the things you love), your mind (the way you think), and your body. These are all wonderful if used correctly, but dangerous if used incorrectly.
  - CHILD, ask your parent to tell you about a time when he/she used heart, mind, or body in a dangerous way.
  - PARENT, have you loved something or thought something dangerous? Talk about how that thing that looked good (sin) turned out to be bad.

## **TRUTH: God made you to love Him.**

*What does the Bible say? (Parent read out loud)*

A man once asked Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment in the Law?” This man was trying to trick Jesus into saying something that would get Jesus into trouble. But Jesus didn’t fall into his trap. Jesus even went on to answer the man’s question. The most important rule that God has ever given is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37).

*What does that mean? (Child read out loud)*

Loving what is good is good. Loving what is bad is bad.

If your mom or dad told you to tie your shoes together, take a big sharp knife in both hands, and then hop around the table you would be right to think your parent is crazy and doesn’t love you at all. But if your mom or dad told you to do something that would be good for you then you’d know they love you. If your parents told you to do something that would make you happy then you’d know they love you. If your parents commanded, taught, and disciplined you so that you gained the most wonderful treasure in the whole world you probably wouldn’t like the discipline, but you’d be glad you gained the treasure.

God is the greatest treasure. When he commands me to love him he’s commanding me to do the very thing that will make me the happiest.



## **TRUTH: God teaches us through His Word**

*What does the Bible say? (Parent read out loud)*

- Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

Both of you share a story about a time when you ran into something or stepped on something because the room was dark, and you didn’t see it.

*What does this mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Walking in the darkness causes pain.

If we don’t listen to God’s Word it’s like being lost in a dark room. We cannot know God apart from the Bible. We cannot even love God without God’s Word. If we try to be a family without God’s Word we are going to hurt ourselves and others. God’s Word shows us how to be family. We can’t do marriage, spend money, have friends, or even be a part of a church without the wisdom of God’s Word. God teaches us through His Word. We must listen to Him. This is why we want to read the Bible every day.

REVIEW today’s Main Point: God made you to \_\_\_\_\_ him and He gave you His \_\_\_\_\_ rules.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- Does God give you instructions and commandments because He doesn’t like you or because He loves you? How do you know?
  - *God tells me in his Word that he loves me. By giving Jesus for me, God proves that he loves me (Romans 5:8).*
- Who knows how life works best, God or you?
  - *God knows best.*
- Why it is important to read God’s Word every day?
  - *The Bible is the way God has chosen to make himself known to us and in the Bible God tells us how to do life.*

**PRAY Together**

Psalm 119:73 is a prayer, “Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.”

As you continue this study together, ask God to give you understanding. Ask God to show you what He expects of you. Tell God that you know you can trust Him because He made you.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 3.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Man- Part 2**

**Big Idea:** Man is created and a rule breaker.

**Memory Verse:** “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

Use this page to practice writing the memory verse or draw a picture that illustrates the memory verse.

## Day 4: Man, the Created

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 3)?*

*Work on memorizing Romans 3:23 and the Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** For \_\_\_\_\_ have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

**Big Idea:** Man is \_\_\_\_\_ and a rule-breaker

**Today's Main Point:** We should listen to and obey the God who made us.

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### **TRUTH: God created us to listen to Him**

*What does the Bible say? (Parent read out loud)*

- Genesis 1:28-29, “God blessed [the man and woman He created] and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” (Genesis 1:28-29)

The first thing God did after creating Adam and Eve was bless them. He encouraged them and promised to do good to them. The next thing God did was give them instructions. He gave them rules for living.

### **TRUTH: God gave man rules for his good**

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- Genesis 2:15-17, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’” (Genesis 2:15-17)

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

From the very beginning, when man lived in a perfect world, God gave man instructions. God continues to teach us how to gain the good and avoid the bad (“Drink the apple juice, not the poison”).

TALK with your child about a time when you taught him/her to do something (how to feed herself/himself, ride a bike, play a game, use the potty, etc.). Highlight the

importance of rules and guidance. This would be a good chance to pull out some old videos and show your child what she or he was like as a toddler.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- What can we expect to happen if we do not listen to the God who loves and teaches us?
  - *If we turn away from God, then we can expect things to be hard (Proverbs 13:15; Ecclesiastes 2:26). We will be frustrated and try to make ourselves happy without God. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)*

### **TRUTH: God created Man to take care of the world and others**

*What Does the Bible Say? (Child read and answer)*

God gave Adam (the first “Man”) instructions for life. Fill in the blanks using Genesis 1:28.

**Be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the earth and \_\_\_\_\_ it and \_\_\_\_\_ over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.**

*What Does That Mean? (Parent read out loud)*

God gave Adam an incredible gift. God gave him the world. And He gave him the world so that Adam would take care of it and bring out its best. God gave Adam a wife so that they could have children and fill the earth with happy families who love God, listen to God, and follow God. These happy, God-loving families would build cities and work for the glory of God and the good of others. With happy, God-loving, God-listening, God-following families filling the earth, there would be no place for sadness or fear. There would be no hurt feelings or hateful words. No one would ever die, and there would be no reason to cry.

Each one of us was created to listen to God and learn from Him. God teaches us for our good. The most foolish thing anyone could do is refuse to listen to God.

*TALK About It*

- Each of you share where you are having a hard time doing what God has told you to do.

*PRAY Together*

James 1:19-21 says, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul.”

CHILD: Ask God to help your parent listen to Him and not make excuses for his/her sin. Ask God to show your parent his/her sin and ask God to help your parent believe the good news that Jesus died for his/her sins and rose again on the third day.

PARENT: Ask God to help your child listen to Him and not make excuses for his/her sin. Ask God to show your child his/her sin and ask God to help your child believe the good news that Jesus died for his/her sins and rose again on the third day.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 4.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Day 5: Man, the Rule-Breaker**

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 4)?*

*Work on memorizing Romans 3:23 and this lesson’s Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** For \_\_\_\_\_ have \_\_\_\_\_ and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

**Big Idea:** Man is \_\_\_\_\_ and a rule-\_\_\_\_\_

**Today’s Main Point:**           **Man refused to listen to God.**

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*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **Man listened to Satan instead of God.** READ Genesis 3:1-6 aloud together from your Bible.

*What does this mean? (Parent read out loud)*

This is the story of Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve, where everything went wrong. Satan tricked Adam and Eve into thinking that God was mean to them and was keeping good things from them. Adam and Eve had a choice to make. They could listen to God, follow Him, and enjoy the good of being with Him. Or, they could listen to Satan, disobey God, and be punished. Adam and Eve chose to turn

away from God and do what they wanted to do instead of the good thing God had taught them to do.

Every bad thing in us, and in the world, can be traced back to this bad decision.

## **TRUTH: We have all turned away from God**

*What does the Bible say about it? (Child read out loud)*

- Romans 3:10-12, “None is righteous, no not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one.”

*What does this mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Each one of us is just like Adam and Eve. We have all sinned against God because we refuse to listen to Him and obey Him.

To be “righteous” basically means you do what is right. It means that you have only and always done, said, and thought the right things. The right things are God’s things, those instructions He gave us. Have you ever done, said, or thought anything wrong? Have you always done, said, and thought ONLY what God has said to do, say, and think?

**Take the Test...** *(Parent ask)*

- Have you always loved God more than your toys and been glad to share your good things with your brother, sister, and friends?
- Have you ever not wanted to do something God told you to do like go to church and worship Him?
- Have you ever taken something without asking? That’s called stealing.
- Have you ever told a lie?
- Have you always listened to your parents and gladly obeyed every instruction they gave?
- Have you ever wasted food or torn up something that was still good?
- Have you ever said something mean or nasty to hurt someone’s feelings?

Child read out loud Romans 3:10-12

- “None is righteous, no not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one.”

Parent ask and then read the following

- Can you still say that you are righteous? Can you say that you have always done, said, and thought ONLY what is good?<sup>10</sup>

Your problem and my problem is very big. No one understands how life is supposed to work. No one wants to listen to God. We all want to do things our way. We keep doing, saying, and thinking bad things. We hurt other people. Because we have turned away from God everything has gone wrong, and nothing works. Friends get hurt and leave. Parents separate and break up families.

God tells us that there is not one good person out there. Not even one. Not me and not you. We are filthy and dirty because we have turned away from God.

PRAY Together

Ask God to show you the ways that you have turned away from Him.

Repent to God (tell him you are sorry for your sin) and thank God for giving Jesus so that you can be forgiven.

Pray for one another and ask God to show each of you your sin.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 5.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## Day 6: Punishment for Sin

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 5)?*

*Work on memorizing Romans 3:23 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** For \_\_\_\_\_ have \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

**Big Idea:** Man is \_\_\_\_\_ and a rule-\_\_\_\_\_

**Main Point: God will punish disobedience**

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<sup>10</sup> *A brief note to parents:* For your child to understand what Jesus did on the cross he/she must understand his/her own personal sin against God. Do not try to make your child feel guilty for disobeying you. Help your child understand that he/she has disobeyed God. One of the marks of being a Christian is personal repentance or sorrow for sin. Does your child have this mark of a believer?

## **TRUTH: Punishment is coming**

*Parent read out loud:*

The good news is the Creator of the world has promised to do something about His world that has become so messed up by sin. The bad news is, we are the problem.

Now you may not think that you are a bad person. At least you are not as bad as that kid at school or maybe your little brother or your big sister. But listen to what Jesus said, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). It is not enough just to be “not as bad” as someone else is. God says you must be perfect like He is. If you are not as perfect as God is, then you cannot be with Him. You will miss the best. You will spend forever without God and all the goodness that He offers.

*What does the Bible say about it? (Child read out loud)*

- **God will judge us:** “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” (Matthew 12:36)

*What does that mean? (Child read out loud)*

God loves perfectly, and He expects the people He made to love perfectly. God does everything right and so He expects the people that He made to do everything right as well. Sometimes I do things I know are wrong, but my parents or teachers don’t catch me. I might think that I am not in trouble because no one saw, but that’s not true. God saw. God sees everything. He is the Judge, and He punishes wrong. He promised to judge me, and that means I am in big trouble.

## **TRUTH: Sin leads to death**

*What does the Bible say about it? (Parent read out loud)*

- Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death”

*TALK about it (Parent read out loud)*

Have you ever given your mom flowers? Maybe you picked her some from the front yard or from the garden? (If you haven’t, you probably should, but be sure to ask before you pick someone else’s flowers. Don’t forget: Thou shalt not steal.)

When you picked that flower it was pretty and tall and the colors were bright. But overnight something changed.

- What happened to the flower after you picked it? Why did that flower begin to wilt and fade and die?
- Can you reattach the flower or put it back into the ground so that it comes back to life?



Because of sin you are like that flower. Sin separates you from God. Sin makes you die physically and sin caused you to die spiritually.

It is hard to see that death right now in your young body but I'm sure you have seen it in your grandparents or some of the older people in the church. Their bodies aren't young and strong like they used to be. They are dying.

*REVIEW (Child read out loud)*

Romans 3:23 says, "the wages of sin is \_\_\_\_\_."

Have you ever seen a real animal that has been stuffed? Maybe you've seen a stuffed bear or a deer at a store or in someone's home. Those animals look alive, but they are dead. They look alive but there is no life inside of them.

Apart from trusting in Jesus, every person looks alive but spiritually speaking they are dead. Romans 3:10-12 tells us that no one understands, and no one seeks God. Your heart has gone wrong. You have turned away from God. We all have.

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Because of sin your body will one day wear out and die. Because of sin your heart is cold toward God and you have done bad things (Praise God He is working in your heart now!). You don't love God and others like you should and God has promised that he will judge you. He will punish you. You have turned away from good. All there is to come is bad.

Hebrews 10:27 tells you that If you do not change there is nothing for you "but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

Now, I don't want to scare you so that you pray a prayer and get baptized to avoid this frightening place. I want you to see that God will judge you and God will punish your sin. You desperately need someone to save you. You cannot handle your sin on your own.

*PRAY Together*

- Pray that God would make each one of you as serious as he is about your sin.
- Pray and ask that the Holy Spirit would show each of you where you are sinning and what is going to happen to each of you because of that sin.
- Pray that each of you would see how bad your sin is and how wonderful Jesus is.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 6.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

# **Christ – Part 3**

**Big Idea:** Jesus is the God-man, the rule-keeper, and our punishment-taker

**Memory Verse:** “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV). Consider using the CSB version for readability, “He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Use this page to practice writing the memory verse or draw a picture that illustrates the memory verse.

## Day 7: Jesus the God-Man (God became man)

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 6)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:21 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** “For \_\_\_\_\_ he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**Big Idea:** Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_, the rule-keeper, and our punishment-taker.

**Today's Main point: Jesus is completely God and completely man**

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*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **Jesus is fully God:** “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).
- **Jesus created everything:** “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-17)
- **Jesus is exactly like God:** “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:1-3)

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Jesus is exactly God. God the Son is exactly like God the Father because they have an identical nature. Basically, this means that the same stuff that makes up God the Father is the exact same stuff that makes up God the Son. The Father and Son are different persons but share the same essence.

Jesus is different from every other man that God ever sent. Jesus is not just a prophet, or just a man, Jesus is God's Son. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus, the Son of God, “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”

This is truly deep, wonderful, exciting, and sometimes confusing. It is important that you understand that Jesus is fully God. This is important to understand when it comes to Jesus dying on the cross to take the punishment for your sins. You'll understand more as we go. But grab onto to the truth that Jesus is, in fact, fully completely God.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- Is Jesus filled with half of God? How much “God-ness” or “deity” is Jesus filled with?
  - *Jesus is fully God. Jesus has all deity and all humanity (except for sin).*
- We learned earlier that God created everything. Who does Colossians 1:15-17 say created all things?
  - *Colossians 1:15-17 say that Jesus created everything.*
- What does this say about Jesus?
  - *Jesus is God.*

*REVIEW Today’s Main Point.* Jesus is completely God and completely man.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **God became a man/The Word became flesh:** The Apostle John lived with Jesus for three years and this is what he had to say about Jesus, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).
- **God became like us:** Hebrews 2:14 says this about Jesus, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil “.

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

The Word is another name for the Son of God or Jesus. Read the verse again with that in mind: “The [Son of God] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John saw Jesus eat, sleep, laugh, cry, and teach. After watching Jesus and living with Jesus for three years, John tells us that Jesus is certainly a man (he became flesh) and Jesus is certainly God (the Son had the glory of the Father).

Jesus did not just look like a man. Jesus was a man. He had muscle and tendons and lungs and a brain. He had blood pumping through his heart and air coming out of his nose.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **Jesus is the God-Man for us:** The end of Hebrews 2:14 tells us that there is a reason Jesus became a man. Why did Jesus share in our humanity? Finish Hebrews 2:14,

“So that by his \_\_\_\_\_

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

We are beginning to see that Jesus came to do something for us. Jesus came on a mission to help us. He came to rescue us from death.

*PRAY Together*

Some things are hard to understand in the Bible. We need to listen to this advice, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” (2 Timothy 2:7).

Pray for one another to think about what you’ve been studying. Take the time to talk with others like your pastor, Sunday School teacher, and other godly people.<sup>11</sup> Take your questions to these teachers God has given you. Pray that each of you will not be afraid to ask questions and take the time to think about Jesus.

Pray for one another to understand. Ask God to help each of you to understand what it means that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Ask God to help each of you understand why Jesus is so important.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 7.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

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<sup>11</sup> Note to parents: Encourage your child to call a family member or godly person in the church and talk about Jesus. Who is Jesus and what did He come to do? Invite a godly man or woman over to your home for a meal to talk about Jesus.

## Day 8: Jesus the Rule Keeper (He always obeyed)

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 7)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:21 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** “For \_\_\_\_\_ he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that \_\_\_\_\_ we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**Big Idea:** Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_, the rule-keeper, and our \_\_\_\_\_.

**Today's Main point: Jesus always obeyed God for you**

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*The Test (Parent read out loud)*

There once was an eight-year-old boy named Ben. Ben had to take a test. Ben was terribly worried because this was a big test. This was the biggest test Ben ever faced. It was so big if Ben failed the test he would die. But if Ben passed the test he would live. Can you imagine how scared Ben must have felt?

To make it even worse Ben knew he couldn't pass the test. Do you know what Ben had to do? Ben had to jump over the Atlantic Ocean. Ben had to run and jump from New York City to London, England. That's 3,470 miles in one jump!

TALK About It (Parent ask)

- What does Ben need to pass the test?
  - *Ben needs the ability to fly.*
- Can Ben pass the test on his own or does he need help?
  - *Ben cannot pass the test. He needs help.*
- We are all like Ben. We need help. We need Jesus.

**TRUTH: Jesus always did the right thing**

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

Listen to what God the Father said about Jesus, ““This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way like we are, but he never sinned!

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Jesus is your rule-keeper.

Jesus always did, said, and thought the things that pleased God. Unlike Adam, Jesus always listened to God. Unlike you and me, Jesus always loved God and loved others perfectly.<sup>12</sup>

*Jesus takes the test (Parent ask)*

- Did Jesus always love God more than his toys and was he glad to share his good things with his brothers, sisters, and friends?
  - *Yes, Jesus always loves God and does good others.*
  
- Did Jesus always want to do what God told him to do?
  - *Yes. See Hebrews 10:7 if there is debate on this one.*
  
- Did Jesus ever take something without asking? That's called stealing.
  - *No. Jesus never sinned. He never disobeyed God.*
  
- Did Jesus ever tell a lie?
  - *No. Jesus never sinned. He always obeyed God.*
  
- Did Jesus always listen to his parents and gladly obey every instruction they gave?
  - *Yes. Jesus always looked for his happiness by doing what his Father says.*
  
- Did Jesus ever waste food or tear up something that was still good?
  - *No.*
  
- Did Jesus ever say something mean or nasty to hurt someone's feelings?
  - *No.*

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<sup>12</sup> Note to parents: faith that saves is faith that trusts Jesus. Christians trust that Jesus did all that God requires in our place. For your child to be saved, he/she must believe Jesus is his/her righteousness. Does your child trust what Jesus did or is your child trying to obey God and get baptized in order to be saved? You want to figure out what your child is trusting in. Does your child trust in his/her faith, repentance, or baptism? Or, does your child trust in Jesus and what He has done?

*TALK About It (Parent read out loud)*

Go back to Day 5 and compare your child's answers when he/she took the test and Jesus' answers. What is the difference between your child and Jesus?

Jesus loved God above all else and he loved his neighbor as himself. Each one of us does not. Jesus had no sin. We are full of sin.

**TRUTH: Jesus always did the right thing for you**

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

Remember when we looked at Romans 3:10-12 and learned that every one of us is full of sin? We saw that there is none righteous. No not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. No one does good.

No one but Jesus!

1 Corinthians 1:30, "And because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification and redemption."

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

If a person is joined to Jesus by faith then Jesus becomes righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for that person. Righteousness means without out sin. Sanctification means set apart for God; to be holy. Redemption is the price paid to restore something once it has been broken. Jesus takes away our sins, Jesus makes us holy, and Jesus redeems us.

Jesus came to pass the test for us!

*TALK About It (Parent read out loud then ask the questions)*

Remember our friend Ben who had to jump across the ocean or die? Think about God's test for you- you must be as perfect as God (Matthew 5:48). The only person who has ever been as perfect as God is Jesus. Jesus must become your righteousness. He must make you as perfect as God. Jesus must redeem you.

- When a Christian puts his trust in Jesus what is he trusting Jesus to do?
  - *Parent, you want your child to understand and believe that Jesus takes away your child's sin and Jesus gives your child his righteousness. What does your child believe about the cross?*
- What does it mean to believe Jesus is your wisdom from God?
  - *When Jesus is your wisdom, you believe the way Jesus lives is the wise and best way for you to live. Does your child want to follow or imitate Jesus?*
- What does it mean to believe Jesus is your righteousness?
  - *Parent, this is crucial. Believing Jesus is my righteousness means believing Jesus obeyed all of God's rules for me. Jesus gives me his*



*perfection, his righteous standing before God. The classic question is, “When you stand before God and he asks you why he should let you into heaven, what will you say?” For your child to trust the gospel, your child must first learn the gospel message. The gospel message is that Jesus died for my sins and gives me his righteousness. Does your child show the signs of repentance over sins and trust in Jesus?*

- What does it mean to believe Jesus is your redemption?
  - *Believing Jesus is my redemption means believing Jesus did everything God requires for me to be forgiven of all my sins and set free from slavery to sin (read Romans 6 for more on freedom from slavery to sin).*

*PRAY Together*

Thank God that Jesus came to pass the test for us.

Tell God you are sorry for the many ways you failed His test. Tell God specifically how you have failed. Thank God for Jesus who paid the penalty for you and kept the rules for you.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 8.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Day 9: Jesus the Punishment Taker (He died in your place)**

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 8)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:21 and this lesson’s Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** “For \_\_\_\_\_ he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that \_\_\_\_\_ we might become the \_\_\_\_\_ of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**Big Idea:** Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_, and our \_\_\_\_\_.

**Today’s Main point: Jesus died on the cross for your sins**

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*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- Who is the “him” of this verse?
  - *God made him = God made Jesus.*
- Did Jesus have sin?
  - *No, Jesus never sinned.*
- If Jesus didn’t have any sin why did he die on the cross?
  - *Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin.*
- If Jesus didn’t have any sin, for whom was he being punished?
  - *Parent, I ask this question again to help you see if your child understands the work of Jesus personally. There is a difference in knowing the fact that Jesus died for sins and believing or trusting that Jesus died for my own sin. Does your child know, believe, and trust in Jesus’ work for your child’s sin? Does your child have any appreciation or affection for Christ?*
- Look carefully at 2 Corinthians 5:21. What do you become if you are in Christ?
  - *If I am in Christ, then I become the righteousness of God.*

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

Read Colossians 2:13-14 in the ESV, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Jesus is your punishment-taker.

Everything that you have done wrong or will do wrong is called your record of debt. Every bad thing you have ever done, said, or thought is in your record of debt. Every good thing you should have done or said but didn’t do or say is in your record of debt. That is one big sad book isn’t it?

Now that record of debt is proof that you are a sinful person. That record of debt is a big problem. Your wrongs stand against you and accuse you. You are guilty before God. But remember Jesus! He came for the specific purpose of taking that record of debt upon himself. He willingly came to die in your place. He took on flesh and was born because he wanted to take your punishment. 2,000 years ago, your record of

debt was nailed to the cross. Jesus took your sins upon himself and died in your place so you can enjoy God.<sup>13</sup>

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- This is a hard question but very important. How does God forgive all your sins? Look again at Colossians 2:13-14. Using the verse, tell me how God cancels your debt.
  - *God cancels my sin-debt by nailing it to the cross. Jesus died specifically to take my punishment for my sin.*
- Do you have to love God first and then He will forgive you?
  - *No. 2,000 years ago, God took action to love and forgive me.*
- Do you have to promise to do what is right and then God will forgive you?
  - *No. 2,000 years ago, God chose to do everything it takes for me to be forgiven if I trust in Jesus.*
- Do you have to pray a prayer and if you pray hard enough then God will forgive you?
  - *No. Forgiveness doesn't depend on what I do but on what Jesus has done. Parent, does your child show signs of gratitude to God for Jesus Christ?*
- What punishment do you deserve because of those sins? (See Romans 6:32 if you have forgotten)
  - *Romans 6:23 says I deserve to die for my sins but Jesus died in my place.*

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

"The tree" is the cross. Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross.

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

To die to sin means you are given new desires, new wants, and the power to turn away from sin. To live for righteousness means you are given the power to love God and love others. You can be healed! You can change!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>NOTE to Parents: You may choose to read through Isaiah 53 and talk with your child about all the different ways we see Jesus gladly taking our punishment and dying in our place.

<sup>14</sup> Parent, can you see your child's desires changing because of trust in Jesus? Remember, salvation is not perfection now. Salvation is sanctification now because of union with Jesus (slow change in which the believer becomes more like Jesus). Perfection comes after Jesus returns and makes us gloriously new. Being baptized will not change your child. Faith in Jesus, displayed in baptism, will change your child. Does your child have faith? Does your child show signs of increasing love toward God and hatred of

Our friend Ben, who had to jump across the ocean, was not able under his own strength to pass the test. He couldn't do it! But imagine if he was completely changed. What if he was given the ability to fly? If Ben could be completely changed, if Ben could be made new and different, he could pass the test.

None of us can pass God's test. None of us is righteous. But if Jesus takes our sins and gives us his righteousness then we can pass the test. Part of what it means to believe in Jesus is believing that he died on the cross to take away your sins and he willingly gives you his perfect righteousness. This is called the Great Exchange. Jesus takes my sin and gives me his righteousness.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- Whose sins did Jesus take to the cross?
  - *Jesus took my sins, my record of wrongs, on himself on the cross.*
- 1 Peter 2:24 tells us that there is a specific way that you are healed. By what are you healed?
  - *I am healed by Jesus' stripes; by Jesus' punishment.*

*PRAY Together*

Parent: Model for your child what it looks like to genuinely confess your sins to God and trust Christ for forgiveness and righteousness. Don't be vague. Be specific. You have sinned today, and your child has probably seen it. You might have even sinned against your child. Run to God and confess your sins because of Christ.

Ask your child if he/she wants to pray and talk to God about his/her sins.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 9.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Day 10: Jesus is the way back to God**

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 9)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:21 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "For \_\_\_\_\_ he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that \_\_\_\_\_ we might become the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**Big Idea:** Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_, and our \_\_\_\_\_.

**Today's Main point: Jesus lived, died, and rose again to bring you to God.**

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*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

1 Peter 3:18, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

First, we need to remember that Christ is a title, or another name, for Jesus. Jesus suffered once for sins on the cross 2,000 years ago. His sacrifice for your sake cannot be repeated. Payment for your sins does not need to be repeated. Jesus, the perfect and righteous obedient Son, died for you. He died for a specific purpose. Jesus took your sins so that he can bring you to God.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- How many times does Jesus need to suffer to pay for your sin?
  - *Jesus suffered once. Since Jesus is fully God he is the perfect and sufficient (or big enough) sacrifice for my sin.*
- When did Jesus take your sin?
  - *Jesus took my sins on himself on the cross. This happened nearly 2,000 years ago.*
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells that Jesus makes us righteous. 1 Peter 3:18 tells us that Jesus brings us to God. Why does Jesus need to make you righteous before he brings you to God?
  - *Jesus says I must be perfect (Matthew 5:48) but I have sin. Jesus must take my sin and make me acceptable to God. On my own, in my sin, I am not welcome in God's presence.*

**TRUTH: Trusting Jesus means trusting Him to take your sin, give you His righteousness, and restore you to God.**

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

At this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus is preparing to die on the cross, rise again, and return to his Father. Jesus wants to be with his Father and Jesus wants his disciples to be with him. Jesus' plan is to get us back to God. Jesus is clear that the only way to get back to God is through Jesus. Jesus is the way to God.

Remember our friend Ben who had to jump across the ocean? The only way for that to happen is for Ben to be changed. Now, we see that Jesus is the way. Jesus is what

changes us. To be saved, a person must believe Jesus is the way to the Father. Jesus' righteousness must be given. Jesus' payment for sin must be applied. You must believe in Jesus for life.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)<sup>15</sup>*

- What is Jesus' goal when he saves you?
  - *Jesus' goal is to get you back to God. Jesus' goal is to forgive you and restore you to God who is the greatest good.*
- What does Jesus give to those who believe in him?
  - *Jesus gives you his righteousness.*
- Why do you want to trust Jesus and be restored to God?
  - *Parents, listen for your child to demonstrate a desire to be with God and be forgiven. Don't feed your child this answer. Listen and make a plan to help your child.*
- Imagine you are at school and a friend hears that you want to trust Jesus and be baptized. If they asked you why you trust in Jesus what would you say?
  - *Parents, listen for a personal understanding of the gospel. Is there a personal understanding of sin? Is there a personal trust in Jesus for righteousness? We are looking for a personal awareness of sin and trust in Jesus for salvation.*

*PRAY Together*

God, please help me see why Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Show me why I need help getting back to You. I know I need the righteousness of Christ, his payment for my sins, and His powerful life, but there is much I don't understand. Please help me understand. Please help my mom/dad teach me. Please help my pastors and my teachers explain the gospel so I understand it and believe it.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 10.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

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<sup>15</sup> A brief note to parents- these are big questions and it is an awesome responsibility to talk with your child about these truths. We also know that God has given us a church family to help us. If there are questions you can't answer, please set up a time to have a pastor or teacher come to your home and talk with you and your child. You have been given a church because you aren't supposed to do this alone.

# **Salvation - Part 4**

**Big Idea: Salvation involves repentance to God, faith in Jesus Christ, and produces a new creation who follows Christ.**

**Repent, faith, follow**

**Memory Verse:** “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Use this page to practice writing the memory verse or draw a picture that illustrates the memory verse.

## Day 11: A New Creation

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 10)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:17 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "If anyone is \_\_\_\_ Christ, he is a \_\_\_\_\_ creation. The old has passed away; behold, the \_\_\_\_\_ has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**Big Idea:** Salvation involves repentance to God, faith in Jesus Christ, and produces a \_\_\_\_\_ creation who follows Christ.

Repent, faith, follow

**Today's Main point: You need to be made new**

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*Parent read out loud:*

I bet your mom serves you leftovers, you know, food from the day before. If the food hasn't spoiled or started to mold you can fix it up, heat it up, serve it up, and eat it up. But what if the food has spoiled? What if the meat is green and stinky? What if the bread is covered in mold? No amount of time in the microwave can fix green stinky meat. No amount of ketchup could convince me to eat moldy bread. Food can get so bad there is nothing else to do but throw it out and start over. You can't fix it. You must make new food.

Some people think about salvation like heating up leftovers. All I need is a little help here and a little help there and I'll be okay. But the truth is you are ruined from the inside out. You don't need a little help you need a new heart.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **Your heart is sick, big time sick:** "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 19:11)
- **God can change your heart:** "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Your heart is the control center of your life. Your spiritual heart controls your desires and the things you do.

Sin in your heart is a terminal sickness- it leads to death. Your heart will always lead you away from God. You need a new heart, but you cannot change your heart. As you



hear this you might be thinking, “I’m not that bad.” If you think you are not that bad your heart is deceiving you. Your sickness is worse than you realize.

The death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus show you how bad off you are and how much God loves you. Yes, you have a huge record of wrongs and Jesus had to die to pay your debt but God’s love for you is greater still. He has done everything it takes to make you new. God raised Jesus from the dead and gives you Jesus’ righteousness. But God didn’t do all that and then leave it up to you to live life on your own. God will give you a new heart. God will put his Spirit in you. God will change you so that you want to follow him and are able to follow him.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- How do you know your heart is desperately sick? Talk about the ways you disobey God.<sup>16</sup>
  - *Listen for and encourage personal repentance and faith. You may want to ask probing questions like “Yesterday when you back-talked or argued with me what was going on in your heart?”*
- What two things does God promise to give in Ezekiel 36:26?
  - *God promises to give a new heart and a new spirit.*
- In Ezekiel 36:27 God promises when his Holy Spirit is in you, the Spirit will cause you to do something. What will the Spirit cause you to do?
  - *The Spirit will cause the believer to walk in God’s statutes and be careful to obey God’s rules. Parent, do you see in your child a growing desire to obey God?*
- If you are not yet a Christian, talk about how your heart and life will be different when you become a Christian.
  - *A simple answer is, “I will want to obey God.” Be on the lookout for the idea that becoming a Christian or being baptized means I’ll never want or do the wrong thing. You may need to talk with your child about the differences between being saved and being perfect. Talk to your pastors if you need clarity here.*
- If you are a Christian preparing to be baptized, talk about how you see the Spirit working in your heart so that you listen to and obey God.

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<sup>16</sup> Note to parents- One of the marks of the Holy Spirit working on your child is when your child is aware of and sad about his own particular sins. Many children who have heard the gospel are aware of sin as a concept but have not yet been convicted of their own personal sin. Still others may hate being caught but they do not hate their personal rebellion against a loving God. Does your child talk about sin in general, or is he aware of and does he hate his particular sins? Is the Holy Spirit convicting him of his own personal sin? Does he fear God’s just judgment? Prayerfully study the marks of true repentance in 2 Corinthians 7. Though the passage describes the way a church repented, the marks are true for individuals as well. Does your child display these marks of repentance?

- *Look for instances where your child is convicted for doing something sinful or where your child is encouraged to do something good that will be difficult. These instances can be called “evidences of grace;” proof of grace working in your child. Try to draw attention to God’s kindness when these evidences of grace appear. Where does your child show evidence of being led by the Holy Spirit?*

*REVIEW Today’s Main Point. You need to be made new.*

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **You are a new creation if you are in Christ:** “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

You cannot fix yourself or your heart. You cannot make a list of all your sins and then go and make it right. Remember Ben who had to jump across the ocean? He needed to be changed. He needed help from someone else because he couldn’t pass the test on his own.

To be “in Christ” means all that is true of Jesus becomes true of you. You belong to him. You are in! He will give you what you need. Jesus becomes your sacrifice for your sins. Jesus gives you his righteousness. 1 Corinthians 2:16 says Christians are even given the mind of Christ. If you are in Jesus, you are as righteous as Jesus. The Father loves you like he loves Jesus.

The Bible says, the way God fixes you is by putting you in Christ. You are joined to Jesus, by faith, so that all your sins are taken away and Jesus gives you his life. He gives you everything you need.

Tomorrow we’re going to talk about what it looks like for a person to become a new creation. I understand all this talk about being in Jesus may be a little confusing at first but as you continue to pray, talk to mature Christians, and read your bible you will understand more and more.

*PRAY Together*

Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of your sins and show you that Jesus is your perfect sacrifice. Thank God that he loves you so much he sent his Son to be the sacrifice for your sins.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 11.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## Day 12: Repentance

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 11)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:17 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "If anyone is \_\_\_\_ Christ, he is a \_\_\_\_\_ creation. The \_\_\_\_\_ has passed away; behold, the \_\_\_\_\_ has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**Big Idea:** Salvation involves \_\_\_\_\_ to God, faith in Jesus Christ, and produces a \_\_\_\_\_ creation who follows Christ.

Repent, faith, follow

**Today's Main point: To repent means to admit your sin to God and turn away from your sin because you hate it.**

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*Parent read out loud:*

If someone tells you he likes to hunt, how will you know he is telling you the truth? If someone tells you she likes gymnastics, how will you know she is telling you the truth? What if someone claims to love to read, how will you know he/she really does? Now, what if someone tells you he/she is in Christ? How will you know? One of the marks of being in Christ is repentance.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **God tells us to repent:** "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).
- **Jesus told people to repent and believe:** "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).
- **Repentance and faith are necessary:** The apostle Paul said the gospel message commands two things: "repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Every one of us has sinned and every one of us must do something about that sin. You have two choices when it comes to taking care of your sin. You can try to make it right by doing what God says and not sinning anymore (you can try to save yourself). Or, you can repent. Take responsibility for your sinful choices. Do not make excuses or blame your parents, your brother or sister, or your friends. Admit to God what you did and believe that when Jesus died on the cross and rose again, he made it right. Own your sin before God and own what Jesus did to take your sin away. Trust Jesus to save you from God's punishment for your sins.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud. Parent be ready to help)*

- **True repentance can be seen:** “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!” (2 Corinthians 7:10-11).

*REVIEW Today’s Main Point*

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- What is the difference between being sad you got caught and being sad you sinned against God?
  - *Being sad you got caught stops at being sad you are being punished. There is no sadness that you did it. You like it and will do it again as soon as you can. Being said you sinned against God involves sadness over wanting bad things as well as a desire for God to forgive and change your heart.*
- Read 2 Corinthians 7:10 again. It is true that a Christian will be sad about sin, there will be godly grief. But will a Christian want to repent? Will a Christian regret it? Why?
  - *Yes, a Christian will want to repent but sometimes this takes time. A Christian will regret sin but sometimes this takes time. Repentance and regret happen because the Spirit is working in the Christian’s heart. Does your child show signs of regret toward God?*
- What sins in you are you sad about and why do you want to repent? (Don’t talk about sins in the world or other’s sins. Own your sins.)
  - *Parent, we’re looking for the mark of godly repentance here. Does your child show the evidence of God’s grace convicting and turning him/her from sin and toward Jesus?*
- Is repentance something you figure out on your own or is repentance something God works in you?
  - *Repentance is something the Spirit works in you as he teaches you through the Bible.*

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **Repentance comes from God:** One of the reasons a godly pastor and godly parents gently correct you when you sin is because of the hope that “God may perhaps grant [you] repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

- **The Holy Spirit makes you sad about your sin:** Jesus said, “When [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment.”

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Your sin separates you from God and you sin because you are trying to be happy without God. Since God loves you, he will work to stop you, turn you around, and point you in the right direction. God does not want you to miss out on true life. True life is life lived with Jesus. So, God sends his Holy Spirit to help you see when you are doing wrong. The Holy Spirit helps you feel badly when you do something wrong. This is godly grief. The Holy Spirit convicts Christians of sin so that the Christian will turn away from the bad and enjoy the good.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- Will a Christian be sad about his/her sin? Will a Christian repent?
  - *Yes, Christians will be sad and repent. Sometimes this happens immediately and sometimes it happens after another person shows you your sin.*
- Who makes a Christian understand when he/she is doing something wrong?
  - *The Holy Spirit uses God’s Word to show us our sin. Often, fellow church members are the means God uses to show us our sin.*
- Parent, talk about a recent experience you had when the Holy Spirit convicted you of some sin. Be sure to explain how you repented.

*PRAY Together*

Pray and ask God to convict each of you when you sin. Ask God to give you his Holy Spirit so that you understand, hate, and turn away from your sin. Thank God that he loves you enough to come after you and discipline you when you sin.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 12.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## Day 13: Faith<sup>17</sup>

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 12)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:17 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "If anyone is \_\_\_\_\_ Christ, he is a \_\_\_\_\_ creation. The \_\_\_\_\_ has \_\_\_\_\_; behold, the \_\_\_\_\_ has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**Big Idea:** Salvation involves \_\_\_\_\_ to God, \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus Christ, and produces a \_\_\_\_\_ creation who follows Christ.

Repent, faith, follow

**Today's Main point: Faith is dependence on Christ for forgiveness and life.**

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Parent read out loud:

A person must drink water to live. If you don't drink water, eventually, you will die.

If you step outside my house you will see a big tall water tower. That water tower is full of cool clean water. Because of that water tower, people can take baths (maybe you could learn a lesson from those people). Because of that water tower people can cook and not die of thirst! But here is the problem: my house is not connected to that water tower. There is no pipe running from the water tower to my house. All that life-giving water is stored up in that tower ready to be poured out, but it does me no good because my house is not connected to that water tower.

Faith is like a pipe that connects us to Jesus so that we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus stored up righteousness for you 2,000 years ago. Jesus died in your place 2,000 years ago. Jesus has eternal life. You need to connect with Him.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **Salvation is by grace through faith:** "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- What does Ephesians 2:8 say you are saved by?
- 

<sup>17</sup> Note to parents: Be sure you read through this section before you study it with your child. You may choose to divide this lesson, stopping before you get to the section titled "Take a moment to decide where to go next." Feel free to cover this day in multiple days. Let your child be led by Scripture and the Holy Spirit. Be prayerful and careful that you do not push your child to pray a prayer because you want him to. Do your best to encourage your child's personal repentance and faith.

- *I am saved by grace through faith.*
- Is everyone saved, or do you have to have faith to be saved?
  - *Everyone is not saved. A person must believe in Jesus to be saved.*
- Can you explain why grace saves you AND why you must have faith?
  - *Parent, we are looking for personal understanding of the gospel. Does your child want to do good works to be saved? Does your child know he/she cannot do anything to contribute to salvation? Does your child know he/she needs Jesus and Jesus alone?*

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

You cannot earn salvation. You cannot do enough good things to make God love you. You cannot pray your sins away or be baptized and have your sins washed away. There is nothing you can do to save yourself. You need to be saved by someone else. Only Jesus can save you! That Jesus willingly died in your place, taking your punishment for your sins, is grace. Jesus doesn't make you pay him back. He doesn't make you run an obstacle course or do something difficult or scary. Jesus gladly and freely took your sins away and gives you his righteousness.

This is grace: everything you need to be saved has been freely given to you by Jesus.

You sinned and must be punished. So, Jesus took all your punishment for all your sins. You need to be righteous, as perfect as God himself. So, Jesus gives you his righteousness. Everything you need is given to you in Jesus. When you believe Jesus died to take your sins away then the benefits of Jesus' cross are given to you. You are forgiven. When you believe Jesus lived a righteous life in your place then the benefits of Jesus' life are given to you. God looks at you and he sees the righteousness of Jesus. You must trust Jesus to be your punishment taker and the One who makes you righteous. Jesus reconciles you to God.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- When you die you will likely have to stand before God and explain everything you have done. You'll have to give an account for your life. After facing judgment God may ask you this question: Why should I let you into heaven? When God asks you, "Why should I let you into heaven," what will you say?
  - *Parent, we ask this question again to look for clarity. Also, it may demonstrate a growing understanding of Christ for salvation. Where is your child's hope?*
- Everything that had to happen for you to be saved happened 2,000 years ago in the righteous life, atoning death, and powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ. Explain how all those good things can now be applied to you.
  - *These good things from Jesus are applied to me through faith. God said I will be forgiven, saved, and given a new heart because I trust Jesus to make me new. God always keeps his promises.*

*Take a moment to decide where to go next. (Parent read out loud)*

In Acts 2:37, when a man named Peter explained who Jesus is and why he died, the people “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”

Some children who read this book are interested in knowing more about Jesus and baptism. These kids have important questions that need to be answered but they are not yet cut to the heart or convicted by the Spirit. Their own personal sin against God is not a big concern.

Does this describe you? Do you want to learn more about Jesus because you like the stories, but you aren’t too crazy about the need to be forgiven or have Jesus be the boss of your life? Do you want to be baptized because you see others being baptized? If that’s you then that’s okay. Like young Timothy, keep learning the Scriptures which can make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:15). Like the scribe in Mark 12:34, you may not be far from the kingdom. Keep reading your bible, learning about Jesus, and talking to Christians about the gospel. Keep working through this book. It will help.

Still other children who read this book are sad because of their sin; the Holy Spirit is convicting them of their own sin before God. They look back at Jesus’ death on the cross 2,000 years ago and they know it is only through Jesus dying in their place that they can be forgiven. They want to be forgiven. They look at Jesus, now raised from the dead, and they want him to make them righteous. They trust Jesus to give them everything they need. They love God and want to be with God.

Does this describe you? Is being forgiven by Jesus and having him rule over your life something you are desperate for? Do you hate how you have sinned and do you want Jesus to make you clean? Are you ready to repent toward God and put your faith in Jesus Christ?

Ask: Where are you? What do you want to do next?

## **How can I be saved?**

Parent read out loud.

Salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). A person is saved because of Jesus’ righteous life, atoning death, and powerful resurrection. Everything you need to be saved is given to you by grace. Jesus does it for you. Salvation is by grace and what you believe matters. What you put your faith in matters. You receive the gift of forgiveness of sins because Jesus died on the cross. You are given the perfection God requires because Jesus lived a righteous life for you. Do you believe this?

Child, read out loud Romans 10:8-13.



*“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

Parent read out loud.

When you crash your bike, or fall and cut yourself, it is normal to cry out to your mom or dad to help you. When you are hurt you call out for help. When you become a Christian, you call out to Jesus for help. But you haven't wrecked your bike, you have wrecked your life. Call out to Jesus, the one who died for you. Trust that he died to pay for all your sins and you will be forgiven. Call out to Jesus, the one who lived a righteous life. Trust that in him you will become the righteousness of God.

If the Spirit is convicting you of your sin and showing you that Jesus will make you clean, then call upon the Lord and you will be saved. Believe in your heart that Jesus died on the cross for you. Believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. What must you do to be saved? Believe Jesus did everything for you. Trust Jesus and he will not let you down. Call upon Jesus and he will give you everything you need. When you are ready, pray and talk to God about your sin. Ask God to forgive you. Tell him what you believe about Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the grave. Repent to God, put your faith in Jesus, and you will be saved. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved.

You can do that right now. Talk to God in your own words. You may want to pray out loud with your mom or dad in the room. You may want to go to your room or someplace quiet so you can think a little more and then pray. After you have prayed and asked God to save you the first thing you need to do is tell someone. Confess out loud with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord.

*PRAY as the Holy Spirit leads you<sup>18</sup>*

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 13.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>18</sup>Note to parents- Part of salvation is personal ownership of sin and personal faith in Christ. Don't push your child or feed him/her the answers. Don't have your child repeat a prayer after you. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead your child to repentance and faith.

## Day 14: Follow

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 13)?*

*Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 5:17 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "If anyone is \_\_\_\_\_ Christ, he is a \_\_\_\_\_ creation. The \_\_\_\_\_ has \_\_\_\_\_; behold, the \_\_\_\_\_ has \_\_\_\_\_" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**Big Idea:** Salvation involves \_\_\_\_\_ to God, \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus Christ, and produces a \_\_\_\_\_ creation who \_\_\_\_\_ Christ.

Repent, faith, follow

**Today's Main point: A Christian is someone who follows Jesus**

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*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).
- Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 all that I have commanded them. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Being saved is more than going to heaven when you die. Being saved means you have been given a new heart. This new heart wants to follow Jesus. In John 10:27 Jesus called Christians "my sheep." Jesus' sheep are those people who belong to him. Jesus' sheep are those people who listen to him.

Jesus has some specific commands for every Christian. In Matthew 28:18-20 we hear Jesus tell every Christian to be baptized and learn how to obey everything he commanded. In 1 Corinthians 12 we are told that God puts Christians into a church so that each Christian can help build up that particular church. Jesus expects every Christian to be baptized and taught how to obey (Matthew 28:18-20). This happens through healthy relationships in a healthy church.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- We'll talk more about baptism in our next lesson, but for today, what do you think about Jesus telling you to be baptized?

- *Parent, I often ask children if being baptized is something they feel like they must do or if it's something they can take or leave. The desire to obey Jesus is a mark of the believer. Is the conviction to be baptized a passing fad or a firm desire?*
- The commands of Christ have been written down in Scripture. Why did Jesus command his disciples to teach new disciples? Why can't a disciple just learn on his/her own?
  - *No person has all the answers. Early on we saw that even Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden needed God's help to understand this world. We haven't changed. We need God's Word and we need God's church.*
- If you haven't thought about becoming a member of the local church you are attending what do you need to do to become a member? Now would be a great time to call the church and ask (if it's after office hours you can always leave a message. Believe me, the staff will want to hear from a person who wants to become a member of the church).

*Review today's main point (Parent read out loud)*

We've looked at the big commands to be baptized and become part of a church. Let's look now at Jesus' command to take up your cross daily and follow him.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- And Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

To deny yourself simply means to tell yourself "no". Remember Jeremiah 19:11? Read it again in your bible.

A Christian denies herself when she hears the old lies and tells herself no. A Christian denies himself when he has the old sinful desires and tells himself no. After you become a Christian you need to get rid of your old way of thinking and learn to think more like Jesus. Learning Jesus' way helps you stop following your plans and start following Jesus. Be ready, your new heart will want to believe the old lies. If you are going to follow Christ you are going to have to tell yourself no.

Now let's pay attention to Jesus' words and what it means to follow him. Jesus said you must take up your cross daily. Jesus said you must die to yourself. You must pick up your cross every day. Every day you will have to decide if you are going to pick up your cross, tell yourself no, and follow Christ. Every day you will have to decide who is in charge of you. Every day you will decide if you will pursue God who is the greatest good.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- If you listen to the lies of your sinful heart what is going to happen? Look back at Luke 9:23-24. If you save (protect and listen to) that sinful way of thinking, instead of denying it, what is going to happen?
  - *If I listen to myself I will miss out on God's good life.*
- If you deny yourself, give up your old life, and follow Jesus everyday what is going to happen? Look back at Luke 9:24. If you lose (crucify or deny) that old life what is going to happen?
  - *If I listen to God and tell myself no, then I will gain God's good life.*
- As you read your bible, what specific thing is Jesus telling you to do?
  - *Parent, look for personal conviction to follow Jesus. More than escaping hell, does your child show evidence of wanting to follow Jesus? Where has following Jesus cost your child? Has he/she stood against friends or family in order to follow Jesus?*
- As you read your bible, what specific thing is Jesus telling you to say no to?
  - *Parent, look for personal conviction of sin.*

*PRAY Together*

Obeying everything Jesus commanded is impossible on your own. This is why you have been given the Holy Spirit. Read these passages and thank God for the Holy Spirit.

- 2 Peter 1:3, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence."
- Jesus said in John 14:15-17, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

Talk to God about what you need to do to follow Jesus. Thank God for giving you everything you need in Jesus. Ask God to show you how much the Holy Spirit can help you obey.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 14.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

# **Baptism - Part 5**

Parent, now is a good time, as you start this final section, to set up a meeting with one of your pastors.

**Big Idea: Baptism is a funeral and a birthday party.**<sup>19</sup>

**Memory Verse:** “We were buried...with him in baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”  
(Romans 6:4).

Use this page to practice writing the memory verse or draw a picture that illustrates the memory verse.

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<sup>19</sup> In a sermon on baptism Russell Moore introduced this idea of baptism as a funeral and a birthday party.

## Day 15: Crucified with Christ

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 14)?*

*Work on memorizing Romans 6:4 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** “We were buried...\_\_\_\_\_ in baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

**Big Idea:** Baptism is a funeral and a birthday party.

**Today's Main point: I died with Christ**

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Parent read out loud:

We didn't see Jesus rise from the dead. We believe it because God says it. Faith believes that what God says about Jesus is true. And faith acts upon what God says. Faith is living life believing what God says. Today we are going to look at what God says happens to you through Jesus' death.

2,000 years ago, Jesus died as the atoning sacrifice for your sins. Jesus died to take away your sins and 2,000 years ago Jesus rose from the dead so that all those who are joined to him by faith can live. Jesus paid for your sins, and gives you His life. In baptism, you are telling everyone you died with Christ and you will now live a new life because of Christ. In baptism, you are inviting your church to pray for you and encourage you to live a holy life.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **I have been crucified:** “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” Galatians 2:20

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

We talked earlier about faith being what connects us to Jesus. Through faith, what is true of Jesus becomes true of you. Jesus' death for sin becomes your death to sin. This is a wonderful truth, but it is also a bit confusing. Galatians 2:20 tells us that Jesus' death nearly 2,000 years ago was your death to sin. You died with Christ. Jesus paid the death penalty for sin for you and Jesus gives you the power to live life like him. Jesus took your death for sin and gives you his life, so you can live life with God.

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- When does Galatians 2:20 say you died? When were you crucified?
  - *Galatians 2:20 says I was crucified with Christ.*
- So, who no longer lives?
  - *I no longer live. I am no longer the boss of me. Jesus is my boss and gives me strength through the Holy Spirit and guidance through the Word, so I can obey.*
- Who now lives in you?
  - *Jesus lives in me.*
- How do you now live life? Galatians 2:20 says “the life I now live in the flesh I live” how?
  - *I live life through faith in Jesus Christ. I depend on Jesus, so I can have strength and joy to tell myself “no” and gain God’s good.*

Parent read out loud:

Jesus does not want you to simply start doing new religious things like praying or going to church. God knows your sinful self will not be changed by simply doing new things.

Have you ever had a bad cut or scrape? Maybe you fell off your bike or fell while you were running. I remember one day when school let out I decided to ride my bike as fast as I could to impress my friends. I ended up falling in front of the school, cutting my knees, hands, and elbows, and crying all the way to the nurse’s office. Not cool! When you are cut badly you need broken blood vessels to be healed and you need new skin to grow where the old skin was torn. You need the broken old stuff to go away and you need new stuff to take its place. Now, it would be crazy to think my cut would heal simply because I went to nurse’s office. I needed new skin! Think about how your heart must change. No one has a new heart simply because they start doing new things, even good things like going to church, praying, or being baptized. You must die and be made new.

2,000 years ago, Jesus was crucified as the payment for your sin. God tells us that every Christian was crucified with Christ. Your sin can not be forgiven because you start doing new things. You can’t be healed that way. You must die. You must be crucified with Christ.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **I was crucified with Him:** “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin” (Romans 6:6-7).

*TALK About It (Parent ask)*

- When was your old self crucified?
  - *My old self was crucified with Christ. Christ was crucified nearly 2,000 years ago. Faith is believing Christ's death back then does me good right now.*
- Why was your old self crucified with him? Romans 6:6 says “our old self was crucified with him in order that” something might happen. What happens when you die with Christ?
  - *I was crucified with him so that the body of sin would be brought to nothing; so that I will no longer be enslaved to sin. When I die with Christ he becomes my boss and sin is no longer my boss.*
- We talked earlier about sin bossing us around. What must happen so that we can be set free from sin?
  - *I must die with Christ and be given new life with Christ. I must believe the old sinful me is dead and the new righteous me is alive.*
  - *Parent, does your child give evidence that he needs the death and life of Christ? Is he trusting in Christ or in something your child has done, like praying a prayer or asking Jesus into his heart?*

*Child read out loud:*

***Truth: Saving faith believes Jesus paid for my sin and gives me strength to live a new life.***

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Romans 6:23 says, “the wages of sin is death.” Your sin-debt must be paid, and Jesus died to make the payment God requires for your sin. But you also join Christ in his crucifixion so that you can have a new life and no longer be bossed around by sin. When you died with Christ sin lost its power to control you. Now for the first time, because you died and were raised with Christ, you can tell sin “No!”

This is where faith is so important! You need to be clear about what God is telling you. God is not telling you to go build a cross in your backyard and physically nail yourself to it. That would do nothing for you. God is telling you to believe that when Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago the full and final payment for your sin was made. God is telling you to believe that because Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago and because you are joined to him in a death like His you have been set free from sin. Your sins are paid for because of Jesus' death and you have power to live an obedient life because by faith you joined Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Remember, it is by faith that you were crucified with Christ. When you are baptized in water you are telling the whole world that you have been crucified with Christ through faith in him.



*PRAY Together*

Pray for one another and ask the Holy Spirit to help each of you understand everything you have been given in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:12). Thank Jesus for his death. Thank him that your sins are forgiven because of the payment he made on the cross. Thank Jesus that he set you free from sin and gives you the power to live a new life.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 15.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Day 16: Buried with Christ**

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 15)?*

*Work on memorizing Romans 6:4 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "We were buried...\_\_\_\_\_ in baptism into \_\_\_\_\_, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the \_\_\_\_\_ by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

**Big Idea:** Baptism is a funeral and a birthday party.

**Today's Main point: I was buried with Christ**

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Parent read out loud:

After a person dies that person is buried in a grave. We look at that mound of dirt covering the casket and we understand that person is dead. They are not sick or sleeping. They are dead and buried. In this sense, burial is final. By faith we need to believe and understand that our old sinful-self died with Christ and has been buried with him.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **I have been buried with Christ:** "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" Romans 6:4

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Your baptism into water is like a burial. By faith, the old sinful you was crucified with Christ, is dead, and needs to be buried. You believe your salvation began 2000 years ago when Jesus was crucified and buried. Now, you join him by faith in a death

like his. By faith you join in Jesus' death. What is true of Jesus becomes true of you and the way you tell people you died with Christ is by being buried under water. You are buried in a watery grave.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- How does Romans 6:4 say we were buried with Christ? You were buried with Christ by what?
  - *I am buried with Christ through baptism.*
- Does a dead person get to make decisions for himself or rule over himself?
  - *No, a dead person is moved by and ruled by another.*
- When you are buried with Jesus by baptism into death you give up the right to make decisions for yourself. Take a moment to talk with your parent about what it means in everyday life for you to give up your rights, be buried with Christ, and walk in a new life.
  - *Here we are looking for children to confess Jesus is Lord and be able to give evidence of submitting to the rule of Christ instead of going along with the world. Does your child want to follow Christ or just go through the motions for baptism?*
  - *Parent, emphasize the need to read and study the Bible everyday so you can know what Jesus wants. Be honest about the struggles you have to give up your rights and walk in a new life.*
- Want to know more about the powerful death of Christ for us? Read Hebrews 10:1-18 and write down what doesn't bring forgiveness of sins and what does.

Parent read out loud:

Every religion says their teacher gives truth or guidance. Jesus is different. Jesus does more than teach and guide his people. God tells us that we must die with Jesus, be buried with Jesus, and rise again with Jesus. By faith, you join Jesus so his death for sin becomes your death to your sin. Jesus paid for your sin and he gives you power to change. When you are baptized you are saying, "I have been crucified with Christ. And I have been buried with him."

*What the Bible Says (Child read out loud)*

- **Bury the dead:** "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" (Romans 6:3-4).

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- Do you understand why it is necessary to join Christ in his death? Explain it in your own words.

- *Parent, here we are looking for your child to have an awareness of his/her need for a new heart or the ability to follow Jesus. By faith we give up our efforts to be good and we trust Jesus to make us good.*
- Explain how baptism in water is like burial.
  - *In baptism, the person being baptized is put all the way under water like a dead person is put all the way underground or all the way into a tomb.*
- Why it is right for Christians to be baptized?
  - *Baptism is right because Jesus commands it. Baptism demonstrates that the person being baptized has, by faith, joined Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection.*
- What does your baptism say about you?
  - *Parent, here we are looking for your child to show an awareness of having joined Christ. Baptism is more than showing removal of sins or power for new life. Baptism shows union with Christ so that sins are removed and a new heart is given.*

Parent read out loud:

Remember, it is by faith that you were buried with Christ. When you are baptized in water you are telling the whole world that you have been buried with Christ through faith in him. Jesus gives you his life and you have given Jesus the right to rule over every part of your life.

*PRAY Together*

Pray for one another, asking for God's help so you can understand what it means to be crucified and buried with Christ. Talk to God about anything you may not understand. Ask God to send his Holy Spirit and faithful teachers to help you understand his Word.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read Mark 16.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## Day 17: Raised with Christ

*What did you learn in your Bible reading (Mark 16)?*

*Work on memorizing Romans 6:4 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "We were buried... \_\_\_\_\_ in baptism into \_\_\_\_\_, in order that, just as \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_ by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in \_\_\_\_\_ of life" (Romans 6:4).

**Big Idea:** Baptism is a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_.

**Today's Main point: I was raised with Christ**

---

Parent read out loud:

Faith connects you to Jesus. When you are connected to Jesus what is true of him becomes true of you. His death becomes your death. His righteousness becomes your righteousness. His life becomes your life. Do you believe this?

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **I live by faith in the Son of God:** "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" Galatians 2:20

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

2,000 years ago, Jesus died as the atoning sacrifice for your sins. 2,000 years ago, Jesus died to set you free from sin. 2,000 years ago, Jesus was buried then 3 days later he rose again. When you are connected to Christ by faith what is true of him becomes true of you. His payment for sin becomes your payment for your sin. His crucifixion becomes your death. His burial becomes your burial. And because he rose from the dead he can give you life. Because of your faith connection to Christ, Christ lives in you.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **New life:** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4)
- **Alive to God:** So, you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11)

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Jesus did not die and rise again just so you can go to heaven when you die. Jesus died and rose again so that you would live a new life right now. This reminds us of how Jesus' death and resurrection free us from the power of sin, but the gospel also promises us power to live new lives.

Imagine that you have a terrible sickness in your lungs and you can no longer breathe normally or run or play games. When you go to the doctor she tells you that they can't fix your lungs. You need new lungs and if you don't get new lungs you will soon die. It's not enough just to take out your sick lungs, though this must happen. In order to live you need new lungs. You need your bad lungs taken out and new lungs to be implanted or put in.

Spiritually you are just like that. It's not enough just to have your old sinful self crucified with Christ and buried with him. You need to be given new life.

*Child, look up and read out Romans 6:1-14*

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- If you have been crucified with Christ and died to sin can you continue in it? See verse 2
  - *No, having died to sin I can't now live in it.*
- Is the new life (verses 4&5) a life of increasing sin or a life of increasing obedience to Christ?
  - *The new life is a life of increasing obedience. There will be struggles against sin. We must count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.*
- Give me an example of a sin you are struggling with.
  - *Parent, you may want to share an example from your own life. You also want to look for your child to recognize sin and, by the Spirit's help, begin to put that sin off. If your child has no "real life" awareness of sin it is difficult to believe your child has repented of sin or is trusting in Christ for forgiveness for sin.*
- Is it ever right for a Christian to say he or she could not help but sin? See verses 6&7
  - *No, in Christ we are no longer slaves to sin.*
- After you are baptized will you be tempted to sin? See verse 12
  - *Yes, temptation to sin will keep coming. I must fight against it.*
- Verse 13 gives us a strategy for defeating sin and temptation, but it sounds a little strange at first. Talk together about how this strategy works in everyday life.
  - *Parents, it would be helpful for you to talk openly and honestly about your own struggles with sin. The temptation to anger is common to most of us. Talk about how giving your mind to stewing on angry thoughts doesn't*

*help but makes anger worse. Talk about how talking to God about your anger, confessing the sin of anger, acting upon God's wisdom, and depending on his enabling grace has brought you victory over sin. Other sins you may discuss could be laziness, pride, or greed.*

Parent read out loud:

Remember, it is by faith that you were raised with Christ. When you are baptized and come up out of the watery grave you are telling the whole world that you have been raised with Christ through faith in him.

*PRAY Together*

Thank God for all he has done for you in Christ. Thank God for all he has given you in Christ. Ask him to help you understand what it means to live a new life no longer enslaved to sin. Ask him to show you the power of Christ as you say "No" to sin. Talk to God about any sins you are continuing to commit. Confess those sins and ask for forgiveness. Ask God to show you how to stop doing the wrong thing and start doing the right thing.

Choose your next meeting time and place. Commit to read another book of the Bible together.

Lord willing, we will meet at this place \_\_\_\_\_ at this time \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Day 18: Believer's Baptism**

*What did you learn in your Bible reading?*

*Work on memorizing Romans 6:4 and this lesson's Big Idea together.*

**Memory Verse:** "We were buried... \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ into \_\_\_\_\_, in order that, just as \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_ by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in \_\_\_\_\_ of life" (Romans 6:4).

**Big Idea:** Baptism is a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_.

**Today's Main point:** **Baptism is a funeral and a birthday party.**

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Parent read out loud:

Does a birthday party make you a year older? No, you have a birthday party because you are a year older. Does a funeral kill a person? No, you have a funeral because a person has already died. As we look at baptism, it is important to understand that your baptism is a celebration of the fact that by faith the old sinful you has died with Christ, been buried with Christ, and you have been given new life in Christ.

*What does the Bible say? (Child read out loud)*

- **Baptism is like Noah's ark:** <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup> because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. <sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:18-22)

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

When you are being baptized, God wants you to understand there is a connection between the waters you go through and the waters Noah went through.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- Verse 18 tells us Jesus suffered once for sins. The full payment for sin was made on the cross. Who does verse 18 say Jesus suffered for?
  - *Jesus, the righteous one, suffered for the unrighteous. Jesus died for sinners.*
- How does it encourage you to hear that Jesus died for the unrighteous?
  - *Parent, listen for your child to express hope in Jesus. "I can be forgiven. I can have a fresh start. I don't have to be perfect because Jesus makes me perfect."*
- Why did Jesus suffer on the cross? What was the goal for his death? See verse 18
  - *Jesus suffered on the cross to bring me to God.*
- By getting into the ark, Noah and his family were saved. They were brought safely through the waters. Explain why the flood happened? See Genesis 6:11-18
  - *God sent the flood to punish sin. The flood happened because the wages of sin is death.*
- It will help you to understand 1 Peter 3:18-22 if you think about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection like an ark. We've looked at the fact that God has promised to

punish you for your sin. His wrath will be poured out like the flooding rain in Noah's day. What is the only way you can be saved from God's wrath?

- *I must get into the ark. I must believe in Jesus or be "in Christ".*

Verse 21 tells us that baptism is like Noah passing safely through the waters of God's wrath.

*What does that mean? (Parent read out loud)*

Baptism is an act of faith and in baptism you are acting out your faith. You are baptized because you believe you died 2000 years ago with Christ. In baptism, you are buried under the waters of God's wrath. Often when a person is baptized the minister will say "Buried with Christ." You believe you joined him in crucifixion and you believe you joined him in burial. Your baptism is your funeral. You believe and tell the whole world, the old you was crucified and died with Christ.

But thankfully you do not stay under the water. You do not stay in that watery grave. The person baptizing you raises you up out of the waters. You come up out of the grave. There is a resurrection that happens. Because of your faith in Jesus, Jesus brings you safely through the waters of God's wrath. Jesus is like Noah's ark!

Baptism is a funeral and a birthday party. When you come up out of the waters you are telling the world that because you have been joined to Jesus through faith he has given you new life. You are a new person. You have been born again. Baptism is a birthday party.

*TALK About it (Parent ask)*

- What does 1 Peter 3:21 say baptism does?
  - *1 Peter 3:21 says baptism saves you.*
- Does being baptized in water save you? What saves you? See verse 21
  - *Going through the motions, or going under water, does not save. What saves is the appeal to God for a clear conscience through Jesus Christ.*
- Verse 21 tells us that the most important thing in baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience. The person being baptized must confess his/her sins and cry out to God to be made clean. What does verse 21 say brings a good conscience? Does the water take away your sins?
  - *The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ bring a good conscience. The water does not take away my sins. Jesus takes away my sin.*
- What will it look like for you to ask God to forgive your sins?
  - *Parent, here we are looking for express faith in Jesus. I often ask children, "Why will God forgive you?" Some answer that God forgives because he is forgiving or because he is loving. This is true but not all the story. Specifically, God forgives because Jesus died for my sins and rose again. Does your child show the signs of personal faith in Jesus?*



Parent read out loud:

Jesus suffered for sins. Jesus rose again. Jesus has gone into heaven and is at the Father's right hand. He has the highest place of honor. You can trust Jesus to take away your sins. You can trust Jesus to take you safely through the waters of God's wrath. When you are joined to Christ by faith you are made righteous and clean in him.

The physical waters of baptism don't make you righteous. Your faith, lived out through baptism, connects you to Jesus and he saves you. You join in his death for sins. You join in his burial. You join in his resurrection. Because you are joined to Jesus you are given the power to live a new life of glad obedience to him. Jesus is the ark that brings you safely to God.

When you go under the water, know that you deserve God's wrath for your sins, but you are safe in Jesus. When you come up out of the water, know that through the work of Jesus your sins have been washed away. When you walk out of the water, know that because of your faith connection to Christ you are empowered to live a new life. Baptism is a wonderful gift of God!

*PRAY Together*

Thank God for making a way for you to be saved. Spend time rejoicing in the fact that in Jesus your sins are washed away and you are made righteous. Ask the Holy Spirit to continue to teach you everything you need to know about baptism.

Continue reading and discussing God's Word daily.

## The Next Few Steps:

1. If you are a Christian, write out your testimony. Sharing your testimony means telling someone how God saves you through faith in Jesus Christ. Practice talking to your family and friends about being saved. The basic parts of a testimony are:
  - a. What is the gospel? Explain the biblical gospel in your own words.
  - b. What does repentance look like in your life? Explain how you discovered your sin and separation from God.
  - c. What does faith look like in your life? Explain how you discovered Christ is your atoning sacrifice, righteousness, and life.
2. Call your pastor and schedule a time to meet up and talk about either being baptized or, if you're not ready, getting some help as you continue to grow in your understanding of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:14-15).
3. Continue reading your Bible and praying every day. There are Bible reading plans available online (check the resource page at the end of this study). If your church has a Bible reading plan, then join in with them. Find someone in your family or church that you can meet up with every week or two to discuss what you are learning.

# Frequently Asked Questions

- **What if my child understands the gospel and wants to be saved? What do I do?**
  - We take all our cues from Scripture. Any time we wonder what to do, it is good to search the Bible for examples of others facing the same situation. So, where in Scripture do we see people wanting to be saved? The answer is found in Acts 2 and particularly verses 37-41. This study is meant to address the biblical themes of repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit. You may choose to start this study by working through "Day 13: Faith."
  - Romans 10:1-17 also gives a biblical explanation of trusting in Jesus as opposed to trusting in our own works. Read through the passage with your child and focus on verses 9 and 10. Ask your child to explain what those verses mean. If your child demonstrates a personal awareness of his/her need for righteousness and Christ's gift of righteousness through his righteous life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection, then encourage your child to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation. If doing that doesn't make sense, you need to do some teaching. And that's what this study is all about!
- **What should I expect to happen as I work through this study?**
  - Working through this Bible study is no guarantee that your child is a Christian. Finishing this study does not mean that your child should be baptized. I wrote this study to help you learn, look for, and encourage biblical repentance and faith. God has told us a great deal about being born again and we need to teach these truths to our children. I also wrote this study to help strengthen your discipleship relationship with your child. May this be the first of many intentional Bible studies you do with your child to help him/her follow Jesus. I pray this is only the beginning. Finally, I wrote this study to help our children understand, believe, and live in step with the gospel. This journey starts with repentance, faith, and baptism and will continue until Christ returns. May we be found faithful, starting our children on the right foot.
- **What if I believe my child is not ready to be baptized but he/she still wants to be baptized? What do I do?**
  - Part of what it means to be a parent is exercising your God-given authority over your child for his/her good (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20). This authority is not self-serving but for the good of the child. In my own experience, I must regularly tell my children no because they are not yet ready for what they want to do (my 11-year-old asked to drive the other day), or

they ask for things that will hurt them (sodas, candy, and dessert after every meal). Faithful parenting is seeking the biblical discernment to know when to teach and when to say no. Faithful parenting is seeking the courage of Christ to give what is good, especially when what is good is not wanted. If you need to tell your child to wait on baptism, then teach him/her why and ask your child to trust and honor your decision. This is also a great opportunity to talk with your pastor and seek his input and encouragement.

# Resources

Continuing Evangelism, if you and your pastor believe it's best to wait for clearer signs of conversion.

1. *Long Story Short* by Marty Machowski
  - a. This guide works through the Old Testament with readings, questions (answers provided), and prayers based on the reading. The goal is to keep the study to 10-15 minutes.
2. *Old Story New* by Marty Machowski
  - a. This guide works through the New Testament with readings, questions (answers provided), and prayers based on the reading. The goal is to keep the study to 10-15 minutes.
3. *CY: Christianity Explored* published by the Good Book Company
  - a. CY works through the Gospel of Mark to teach children why Jesus came, died, and rose again. The optional *Soul* DVD is helpful also.
4. Parents, there are helpful books (available in audiobook, print, and electronically) that will deepen your understanding of the gospel and conversion so that you are better equipped to talk with your child about salvation.
  - a. *The Explicit Gospel* by Matt Chandler
  - b. *The Gospel* by Greg Gilbert
  - c. *My Child's Profession of Faith* by Dennis Gundersen
  - d. *Conversion* by Michael Lawrence
  - e. *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart* by J.D. Greear

## Daily Bible Reading

1. If your church has a Bible reading plan, start there.
2. YouVersion Bible App has multiple plans. While topical plans (about faith, fear, anger, etc.) are helpful for the short term, it is preferable to begin reading through the Bible every year. If that is too much, read through the New Testament in a year.
3. For helps and several reading plans visit <https://www.esv.org/resources/reading-plans/>

## Continuing Discipleship

1. Many of the resources your church uses to teach students have family or take-home pages to reinforce what is already being taught. Talk to your pastors or children's ministers and ask for recommendations.
2. *Long Story Short* by Marty Machowski

- a. This guide works through the Old Testament with readings, questions (answers provided), and prayers based on the reading. The goal is to keep the study to 10-15 minutes.
3. *Old Story New* by Marty Machowski
  - a. This guide works through the New Testament with readings, questions (answers provided), and prayers based on the reading. The goal is to keep the study to 10-15 minutes.
4. *The Inductive Bible Study Method* by Sally Michael
  - a. This helpful introduction to studying the Bible teaches parents and children how to read, observe, interpret, and apply Scripture.
5. One2One Bible Studies published by The Good Book Company
  - a. These are studies of specific books of the Bible and are written to be discussed with another. These work well for older children who want to study a book of the Bible. There are also studies on manhood and womanhood. <https://www.thegoodbook.com/bible-study/one-to-one-bible-studies/>
6. *Just for Starters* by Philip Jensen
  - a. This book has seven basic bible studies to help establish new believers. This is a great next step after baptism.
7. *Design for Discipleship* published by NavPress
  - a. *Design for Discipleship* is a series of seven books intended to move the newly established believer into a fruitful understanding of God, salvation, and living in this world.

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRICS

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 1 Evaluation from Shelly Melia</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issues of God and conversion.			X		Reference their decision to follow Christ
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on God.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.			X		Keep terminology consistent- Unit=Part Thesis= big idea
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.			X		
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.		X			Could you give specific application points at the end of each lesson?
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			X		
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 2 Evaluation from Shelly Melia</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issues of man and conversion.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching the condition of man and conversion.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.			X		See notes
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.			X		See notes
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.			X		See notes
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			X		See notes
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		See notes



<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 3 Evaluation from Shelly Melia</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issues of Christ and conversion.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on Christ and conversion.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.			X		
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.			X		
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.			X		See notes throughout
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			X		
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 4 Evaluation from Shelly Melia</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of salvation.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on salvation.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.			X		
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.			X		
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.			X		
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			X		
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.		X			See notes- be careful using symbolic language- Children are literal

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 5 Evaluation from Shelly Melia</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of baptism.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on baptism.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.			X		
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.			X		
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.			X		
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			X		See notes- This lesson is pretty symbolic- I know we can't get away from that but focus on the
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.		X			things that children can more readily understand

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 1 Evaluation William Cook</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issues of God and conversion.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on God.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.				X	
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.				X	
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.				X	
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				X	
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 2 Evaluation William Cook</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issues of man and conversion.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching the condition of man and conversion.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.				X	
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.				X	
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.				X	
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			X		
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 3 Evaluation William Cook</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issues of Christ and conversion.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on Christ and conversion.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.				X	
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.				X	
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.				X	
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				X	
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 4 Evaluation William Cook</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of salvation.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on salvation.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.				X	
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.				X	
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.				X	
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				X	
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		

<b>Baptism Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Part 5 Evaluation William Cook</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of baptism.				X	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on baptism.				X	
The material is theologically sound.				X	
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.				X	
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.				X	
The lesson contains points of practical application for prayer and bible reading.				X	
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				X	
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented at a level appropriate for children.			X		



APPENDIX 3  
PARENT SURVEY

**Agreement to Participate**

Agreement to Participate The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current levels of knowledge and confidence of parents preparing their children for baptism. This research is being conducted by Joseph Paul Duncan for purposes of the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before working through the curriculum with a mentor. You will then answer the same questions after completing the curriculum with a mentor. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

- |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I understand what it means to believe the gospel                          | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I understand what it means to be born again, or converted.                | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I understand believer's baptism.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I am able to explain the gospel in a way that my child can understand the | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

gospel and believe the gospel for salvation.

5. I am able to help my child understand his/her conversion. SD D DS AS A SA

6. I am to explain believer's baptism by immersion to my child. SD D DS AS A S

The following questions were added to the post-course survey

7. What did you learn about discipling your child by working through this study?

8. What did you find helpful about this study?

9. What would make this study more beneficial for parents or children in the future?

10. What did you find helpful about the class?

11. What would make the class more beneficial for parents in the future?







## APPENDIX 6

### EMAIL FROM DENNIS GUNDERSON

March 31, 2018

Greetings Paul,

Just a quick note to let you know that on my recent trip, I did get to review your *Preparing for Baptism* notes and I appreciate your work. I think this will be a valuable tool for families and I hope it gets a wide distribution.

Do you have plans to just print some of them as needed in your church, or do you intend to look into publishing it in a book form? Either way, I think it will be useful.

I don't have a lot else to say, section by section or in detail, and nothing comes to mind that I saw lacking or in need of improvement. You've done some really fine work here, and the illustrations in particular will help children connect with the points made.

I was curious, was there any reason that *Your Child's Profession of Faith* (my book) is not among those recommended at the conclusion? It would seem to serve the same ends well.

Every blessing to you,

Dennis

## APPENDIX 7

### THE MARKS OF CONVERSION

God has given us marks of the believer.

**A new heart** or being born again

- Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 3:3
- Has your child been changed?

**Repentance**

- Mark 1:14-15; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11
- Is your child sorry about his/her sin or simply sorry to have been caught or punished?

**Faith**

- Acts 20:21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5
  - Faith is trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Faith is not simply believing Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose.
- Can your child explain the gospel at his/her level?

**Confession**

- Romans 10:9-10
- Does your child show an increasing willingness to submit to Jesus? Can your child explain the importance of the resurrection?

A **desire** to know and obey God

- Hebrews 8:10-12
- Does your child give evidence of an increasing willingness or desire to be with the church, read the Bible, worship, and obey?

Baptism is the **jersey** every Christian wears

- Matthew 28:19- disciples are baptized and taught
- Romans 6:1-4 baptism displays our union with Christ

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING PARENTS AND CHILDREN WITH A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION PRIOR TO BAPTISM AT MAMBRINO BAPTIST CHURCH IN GRANBURY, TX

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018  
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The aim of this project was to equip parents and children with a biblical theology of conversion prior to baptism at Mambrino Baptist Church (MBC). This goal was accomplished by writing a baptism preparation curriculum for children. Parents were trained by a pastor to use the curriculum, then the parents took their children through the curriculum. Before and after using the curriculum, pastors conducted interviews with the parents and children to determine the readiness of the children for baptism.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of MBC, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for requiring conversion prior to baptism. Foundational to the design of the baptism curriculum are six biblical passages: 1 Corinthians 15:1–5; John 3:1–21; Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 6:1–4; Acts 8:26–38 and 16:11–15. Together, these passages serve as the basis for a biblical understanding of conversion prior to baptism. Chapter 3 addresses what it means to test yourself to see if you are in the faith, the role of parents, the role of pastors, and provides a survey of available baptism curriculum demonstrating the need to write a new curriculum. Chapter 4 details the curriculum and implementation. Chapter 5 concludes with an overall evaluation of the project, and suggestions for improvement and further development.

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